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Our lady of Belgium

Lea Laurent

1596
322
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Princeton University.



OUR LADY OF BELGIUM.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

(Published in French).

La véridique histoire de Louise York.

5th edition.

La transfiguration de Sainte Dorothée.

2nd edition.



Lady of Belgium.

(*La Dame de Belgique.*)

by
J. LAURENT.

Translated from the French

ELISABETH M. LOCKWOOD.



Second impression.

LONDON :
THE IRIS PUBLISHING COMPANY,
30 & 31, Fumival Street, E.C.



Our Lady of Belgium.

(Notre Dame de Belgique.)

BY

LEA LAURENT. ✓

Translated from the French

BY

ELISABETH M. LOCKWOOD.



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OUR LADY OF BELGIUM.

PROLOGUE.

I.

 GREY sky, overhanging a grey sea ; a sullen roar from a shingly beach. In the distance, long lines of soldiers, motionless, expectant. Beyond, a murmur of dull sound, in which is blended all the rage and tumult of battle.

All at once, on the right, appears a group on horseback. Instantly a great hurrah bursts from every throat. For in the centre of the group is a horseman who towers by a head above the rest ; it is the King. And close beside him rides a slender, graceful woman ; it is the Queen.

It is She Herself !

She passes in review her heroic troops, among whom her eldest son has received his baptism of fire. He is fourteen.

Winged monsters are buzzing overhead,

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monsters that scatter death. Enemy guns are growling in fury, and bombs are shattering the earth all round.

The stifling dust, the thunder of the cannon, the falling masonry, the groans of agony, the horrible stench of powder and of blood, tell of the horrors of massacre, of unceasing peril.

But She is there, with the Army, with the King ; ever there, Guardian Angel and Defender.

II.

A HOSPITAL ward. On a table, hurriedly arranged, blue packets of cotton wool, bandages and dressings. On another, basins and swabs. On a third, a whole arsenal of instruments of polished steel, a thousand different things that grip and probe and saw and cut. The sickly smell of chloroform is drowned in the more acrid odour of carbolic.

Suddenly, outside, a grey motor ambulance, bearing the Red Cross, is brought to a standstill. It is full of bleeding and mutilated humanity ; a fresh batch of wounded has been brought in.

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The door is opened, and two Sisters advance to begin their work. But the sight is more than ordinarily terrible. They pause, shuddering, overcome with the horror of it.

Then a third, fragile and refined, comes forward. Bravely smiling, she faces the dreadful sight. In gentle tones she gives directions to the orderlies and assistants who have followed her, and with every precaution she has the wounded lifted from the stretchers and laid on the beds prepared for them. Then, one by one, she examines them, confers with the doctors, and finally, in the midst of all the bustle, herself begins an operation.

This slight, delicate woman established the Hospital. She manages it and is surgeon and nurse in one. She is there in the throng of stretcher-bearers, amid bales of bandages and dressings and cases of drugs and medicines ; she has her eye on everything, looks into every detail, coming, going, here, there and everywhere, a slave to duty.

It is the Queen

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III.

SHE has become the idol of the Army. If you speak of the Queen to a Belgian soldier, tears come into his eyes and it is impossible to describe the tone in which he says: "Oh—the Queen !.....," or the eloquence of the pause that follows.

When it became necessary to leave Brussels, the first thought of the King, as well as of the Government, was for the Queen and the Royal children. It was decided that they should go to England, there to wait for better times. For the children the matter was soon arranged, but nothing could persuade the Queen. In vain it was represented to her that her duty was to take care of herself for the sake of her children and her country; that she would be in continual danger, that she would make everyone anxious for her safety. The King himself tried to convince her that he would be easier in his mind and freer if she were not exposed to risks, but it was no use. With gentle seriousness she re-asserted her determination to stay; and she stayed. And far from being a hindrance, as might have been feared, she became the

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Providence of the Army. All the world was charmed by her simple heroism, and the Queen of the little kingdom of Belgium became the Queen of Hearts.

It is not surprising that a legend should have grown up around her, and that in the imagination of children she has been vaguely confused with another Elisabeth.

“Elisabeth our lovely Queen
From Brussels has departed,
Her royal palace holds no more
Our Lady tender-hearted.
But every night two angels come
And strew her bed with roses,
And kiss her gently on her brow
Till softly she reposes.”

The tiny little girl who sang this song to me—whose clear eyes reflected the pure depths of her belief—placed as a matter of course on the head already bearing the royal diadem and the consecrated crown of sorrow, the shining halo of a saint.

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IV.

A SAINT.

I love to read the Lives of the Saints, for in them one always finds something to make one forget the sordidness of this Vale of Tears, something that awakens in my heart the lingering memories of childhood. And I love to trace in these good books the paths that the Saints must have trodden to raise themselves above their condition of simple mortals. That Saint A or Saint B should have performed this or that miracle is, after all, not surprising, since they had arrived at a state of such extraordinary perfection that there was nothing left for them to do but to die and be canonised. But how did they arrive at this perfection? What events, what external influences had wrought with such blessed effect upon their souls? This is what has always interested me keenly.

Queen Elisabeth is something of a Saint. In any case, her personality is absolutely unique. And I have wondered what has formed this character, so perfect, so admirably fitted for the varied and almost irreconcilable parts she has been called upon to play. What are the circum-

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stances which have prepared the Queen for her present noble mission ? What are the forces of heredity, environment, education, habit, which have enabled her to rise, naturally and without effort, to the height of a tremendous task before which other Queens have broken down ?

V.

I DO not know the Queen.

I have never even seen her, and it is better so ; for I should undoubtedly be influenced by her personal charm, which would make the task I have undertaken impossible. In order to accomplish it, to make the character study I had in view, it was necessary for me to observe the object, so to speak, from afar : to consider Queen Elisabeth as though she were a historic personage of a bye-gone day.

I have had no desire to pry into the life of my heroine. I have been content with facts accessible to anyone, and if some inaccuracies have slipped into these pages it is of no importance. But I have built up for myself my

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own Elisabeth, an Elisabeth whom I love and revere and worship.

I should be much surprised if the real Elisabeth were very different. Nevertheless, this little book, as its title indicates, is an appeal to the imagination, the work of a novelist rather than a historian.

VI.

SINCE the 4th August, 1914, Belgium has become a Holy Land, a land which has suffered martyrdom. When I think of Belgium I no longer see a pretty country, full of charming nooks and corners, alive with work and cheerfulness. The name calls up a totally different picture.

I see a cathedral, a vast Gothic building, dim and mysterious, saddened by having been the witness of so much agony. Like Niobe, it seems to have been turned to stone by immeasurable grief.

In this church one walks on tip-toe, for fear of waking the sleeping dead. The breathing is oppressed and one feels as if at midnight the nave would be thronged with ghosts. Most of

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the stained glass in the windows is so sombre that hardly any light can penetrate the gloom. The church is in darkness ; it is the Church of Sacred Sorrow.

And yet, on either side of the High Altar, the windows are of transparent colours, and the brilliant light of day shines through them like a vivid gleam of Hope.

And the gleam falls on a beautiful statue above the Altar, the figure of a woman whose arms are outspread in benediction.

The features are those of Elisabeth.

It is Our Lady of Belgium.



PART I.

PART I.

A BAVARIAN DUCHESS.

I.

NORTH TYROL and South Bavaria are separated by a political frontier. But this frontier is not a natural one; it is the work only of Custom House officials and map-makers. Otherwise it does not exist, for the country is all one.

Tastes may differ, but to me there is nothing more beautiful in Europe. It is a land of mountains—and such mountains! They are of majestic height, and green all the year round with the beautiful dark green of pines, except where their tops are crowned with perpetual snow and ice. And they are divided from one another by lakes of purest blue. It is the land of the hunter, the land of the deer, the chamois and the black cock. And it is the country of the edelweiss, of the Alpine rose that ensanguines the snow, and of the sapphire gentian.

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The peasants who live in this lovely region have kept, not only to the customs, but to the costumes of their forefathers. They weave their coarse cloth of the wool produced on their own land. They wear short, dark-coloured breeches, supported by broad braces that cross the chest, bright green stockings, leaving the knees bare, a light-coloured waistcoat, blue or grey, embroidered and often ornamented with silver coins. They are reserved in manner, but courteous and hospitable. They adore music, and from the valleys to the heights the land is full of song. They roam through their forest-fairy land singing and jodelling with their wonderful voices and dance on Sundays with their fair-haired, rosy-cheeked *dirndl*n, accompanying their *schnadderhüpfeln* on the *zither*.

Anyone who has once passed through these enchanting regions always longs to return. What, then, must be the regret of her who once had all these precious things for her own and who now, perhaps, may never again behold them!

For Elisabeth is a flower from these Alps.

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II.

NOTHING has more influence on the development of character than early impressions. The sight of beautiful and imposing scenery is enough to awaken noble aspirations in a youthful heart. A child reared in such surroundings never knows *ennui*. A feeling for beauty grows up naturally in the mind and the power of appreciating the harmony of alternate work and pleasure, a harmony fresher and of more permanent interest than the inanities of social intercourse which so soon make town life wearisome.

Elisabeth's earliest affection, her affection for her country, was to be a lasting one. I picture her as a little girl, seated at the edge of some alpine torrent, gazing at the deep channel it has worn between the rocks as it plunges into the seething cauldron below. Or I see her by the side of the Tegernsee, her glance resting on the mirror-like surface, or raising her wondering eyes towards the tall trees of the forest and listening to the bells of her father's castle answering those of the village hard by.

Could she ever forget ?

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III.

HER father was Duke Karl Theodor of Bavaria; her mother, Duchess Maria Josepha, a Princess of the house of Braganza.

The house of Wittelsbach, the reigning house of Bavaria, has two branches—the Royal and the Ducal. Duke Karl Theodor was the head of the latter.

He was the son of Duke Max, an extremely handsome man with an amiable disposition and a broad mind. It was said of him that he preferred the society of his peasantry to that of courts, and the society of his dogs and horses to that of his peasants. He was called "*der Liederreiche*" (rich in melodies), and there is no doubt that from him Queen Elisabeth has derived her taste for music.

There is a photograph of her, in her Brussels home. The room shows the refined simplicity which is evidence of artistic taste. The King is seated with a book of music open on his knees. The young Duke of Brabant, the elder of his sons, is having a lesson on the violin. The graceful figure bending over him and guiding his

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childish hand as he draws the bow across the strings, is the Queen herself, the granddaughter of Duke Max.

Duke Max was not only to be called "rich in melodies," but also "rich in children." His wife, Duchess Ludovica, presented him with no less than eight, of whom four have special interest for us because of their influence, direct and indirect, on the life of Queen Elisabeth.

The first was Ludwig, the eldest son, who, having married the actress, Henriette Mendel, renounced his rights of succession as head of the Ducal house of Bavaria, and also the immense riches that would have accrued to him.

The next was Karl Theodor, the second son, the father of Elisabeth. By the renunciation of his elder brother he became chief of the Ducal house and at the same time heir to the vast fortune of his uncle, Duke Karl.

We shall see later how great was the influence of these events on the development of the character of the Queen.

The third to be noted is Elisabeth, the favourite sister of Karl Theodor, that same Elisabeth who was Empress of Austria and of

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whom nothing now remains but the memory of her beauty and her sorrows. She was the godmother of Elisabeth, Queen of the Belgians.

Finally, among the children of Duke Max must be mentioned Sophie Charlotte, the last of the eight, because in the beauty of her character we see traits foreshadowing that of her niece Elisabeth.

IV.

AFTER having been betrothed to Ludwig II., King of Bavaria, Sophie Charlotte married the Duke of Alençon. Her life and its ending may be summed up in these few words: "She died as nobly as she lived."

She perished, burnt alive in the terrible catastrophe of the *Bazar de la Charité* in Paris, in May 1897. The cinematograph was at that time a novel institution, and the operator, with inconceivable clumsiness, set fire to a room above the one in which the bazaar was held. The ceiling was all in flames before any attempt was made to clear the hall. There was a horrible struggle, in which the strongest had the advantage.

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However, among the men whose brutal selfishness seems to have stifled all chivalrous feeling, there were a few who thought of the Duchess. They hastened to her help, imploring her to escape, even trying to drag her away by force ; but she refused. "I shall stay to the last," she replied. "Save the others first." Some Sisters of the Order of S. Vincent de Paul would not leave her, determined to sacrifice their lives also, if need be. The Duchess remained standing ; the Sisters knelt round her, praying. As the fire drew close to her she loosened her magnificent hair, which covered her like a cloak. And it was so that those who survived the disaster saw her for the last time.

A chapel has been erected near the spot in memory of the victims. Kneeling there in devout meditation one is less moved to pray for the Duchess of Alençon than to feel her presence as a heavenly spirit, gracious and protecting.

The higher the rank, the more forcible the example. The heroism of the Duchess of Alençon is not unique, and lives are sacrificed every day to save others. But there is a strange fascination in illustrious names ; their influence,

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for good or evil, is immense, and in this lies the responsibility of those in high places.

The future Queen of the Belgians was twenty-one at the time of the disaster of the *Bazar de la Charité*, and the behaviour of the Duchess of Alençon must have made a vivid impression on her receptive mind.

V.

ELISABETH had been privileged to have before her eyes, from her tenderest years, an example such as is vouchsafed to few children. To comprehend this fully one must know something of the life that was led at Possenhofen, the principal residence of Karl Theodor, the castle where Elisabeth was born. It is situated in the little town of the same name, which lies at the northern end of the *Starnbergersee*. Life at the castle was very different from that at the Court. There was nothing of state and ceremony ; all was simple and homely. And it was a well filled life.

Children have quick intuitions. The little girl soon realised that her father's life was one of

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work and unrelaxed effort. And she learned very soon that beneath a severe manner he hid the kindest of hearts, a heart accessible to all the unfortunate. And her father was very clever—but that was less remarkable, for there are few children who do not believe their fathers to be supremely clever. He really was so to an extraordinary degree, and one day the little girl learned that her father was a doctor.

That was all right, but one thing puzzled the child. Sometimes her father dressed up as a soldier. He had a beautiful uniform with several medals and crosses, a uniform which was extremely becoming. Why did he not always wear it? Why, when he had put it on, did he look so bored as he left the castle; and why, when he returned, did he never seem satisfied until he had dressed in his every-day clothes again?

This was the subject of great confabulations among the children (there were five of them and Elisabeth was the second) before they understood. At that time she was no longer a very little girl.

Already she knew the meaning of the words

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Duke and General and that Papa was both ; that he was very rich ; that he was one of the great ones of the world ; that, if he wished to lead a life of pleasure and idleness, no one would have the right to expect anything else of him. When he put on his splendid uniform it was to go to Court, where he held a leading position. She knew all that, and also that Papa was ambitious ; he wanted to cure all the poor people who suffered from eye-trouble, and he was on the way to becoming famous.

Elisabeth thought this very fine.

VI.

FROM this time onward, the admiration of the girl for her father ceased to be childish and irrational ; it became discriminating and was all the stronger for being based on conviction rather than on instinct.

She reasoned to herself that it was a desire to relieve suffering humanity which had driven her father to study medicine, but that he must also have had an innate love of science, without which he would never have been able to attain his present pre-eminence.

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It was perhaps these reflections which awoke in her the first vague consciousness of duty to be done, of a vocation to be followed.

Still, her mind had not as yet fully grasped the consummate beauty of her father's character. But the day came when the truth was revealed to her and she realised that he was indeed one of the elect, taught by suffering, which is the source of all that is finest in this world.

Duchess Maria Josepha was not his first wife. He had married, at twenty-six, Sophie, daughter of the King of Saxony. Their union was of short duration—hardly two years. The young wife was carried off by diphtheria and the most skilful doctors were powerless to save her.

In the last night-watch beside her coffin, Karl Theodor resolved to consecrate his life to medicine so that he might spare others, as far as human science made it possible, the terrible grief by which he was overwhelmed.

That night of tears brought him consolation.

"I set to work immediately," he related. "I had not lost too much time, and I experienced no great difficulty in setting to work again. I despised grandeur, probably owing to tempera-

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ment, but I had a distinct feeling that certain things had to be sacrificed to my birth and my duties. So I went through the campaign of '70 (I was then Colonel) and was present at the battles of Gravelotte and Sedan."

But everything urged him to the final goal.

It was from the lips of her father himself that Elisabeth heard of the horrors of these battlefields, and the deep impression they made on him ; how he had then and there decided to dedicate his life to the relief of human pain and had conceived the project of fitting himself, by qualifying as a surgeon, to take the management of a large Field Hospital in some future war.

Was it as she listened, that the project which she had so far only trifled with, first took shape in Elisabeth's mind ? Had she, even then, some vague intuition that it would be her lot to direct, in a future war, the Field Hospital of which her father had dreamed ?

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VII.

NATURE is almost always either prodigal or niggardly. It is not often that she keeps to the happy mean. There are many children who may be considered fortunate in having a good father or a good mother ; but Nature was not content with having given Elisabeth a father who had few equals in the world, but had bestowed on her a mother who was endowed with rare goodness of heart.

The beauty of Duchess Maria Josepha's face reflected the beauty of her soul. She was the perfect model of a Christian wife and mother, and had the virtues of a Sister of Charity.

Her burden was not always an easy one to carry, and Elisabeth often saw her mother absorbed in earnest prayer. The five children she had borne to the Duke had delicate health ; they inherited the fragile constitution of their father. When the young wife felt herself overcome with anxiety she laid her troubles before her God, and it may be that her fervent faith prevailed on Him to let her keep for so long a time those of her children whom He would, perhaps, have recalled to Himself in their early infancy.

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But the Duchess was not only a mother—not only a wife. When she had fulfilled the first sweet, sacred duties of maternity, she found herself less occupied than her ardent soul desired. One thought came continually into her devout mind—the saying of St. Paul : “ If I have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”

Soon the young Duchess—a helpmeet capable of understanding, appreciating, sharing and loving the serious, useful life of her husband—determined to help him in the noble task he had begun. She, too, studied and prepared herself for the rôle of hospital nurse, which she afterwards filled so admirably.

Thus Nature, in this instance exceptionally generous, gave to the young Elisabeth the advantage of resembling both her parents equally.

VIII.

SHE had, to a certain extent, been specially prepared by Providence for the great destiny that awaited her ; above all, by the inheritance of the many talents and virile qualities of her father.

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When a thirst for knowledge and a love of study were aroused in Elisabeth, she might have contented herself with being an excellent nurse. But she had other ambitions. Like her father, she longed not only to alleviate suffering, but to cure it. She had the energy—remarkable in any woman, but still more so in one of her rank—to attack dry and difficult studies, and persevere until her object was attained.

She must have had more than one period of depression, for who has not times of discouragement—days when one despairs of ever reaching the desired goal? At such moments the shining example of her father revived her courage; the recollection of the struggles he himself had undergone and the difficulties he had surmounted inspired Elisabeth with the certainty of final success.

For, in truth, it was not without considerable effort that Duke Karl Theodor had become one of the few princes who have acquired real celebrity in the domain of science.

When, in 1872, he had taken the degree of Doctor of Medicine at the Academy of Munich, he had at first encountered violent opposition in

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his own family. In a class of society where work was looked upon as degrading, it was inadmissible that a prince of his rank could so far abase himself as to become an ordinary practitioner.

But it seems more extraordinary, and less comprehensible, that he had to fight against the opposition of the medical profession as well. The reason of this is not very clear. It is natural, both in Art and Science, to mistrust those whom birth and fortune have favoured; and undoubtedly the Faculty feared that, in spite of his talent, the Duke would be content to rely on the lustre of his degree, and after a time would be nothing better than a mischievous amateur.

It was under these circumstances that he manifested his constancy, his tenacity, his courage and energy. For eight years he was obliged to work under the direction of other medical men without being allowed to practise on his own account; but he never rebelled, and during that time he absorbed all the knowledge of his teachers.

Can we not perceive from whom his daughter

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derives the firmness and serenity of character which nothing can disturb ?

IX.

AT last, after a long struggle, Duke Karl Theodor gained his end.

Little by little—urged on, it is said, by the Russian doctor, Ivanov, who had witnessed his lightness of touch and sureness of hand, and also drawn by his own personal inclinations—the Duke specialised in diseases of the eye.

He established several Eye Hospitals, and his reputation soon equalled, then surpassed, that of the most celebrated oculists.

Everything is justified by success, and the family, proud of his ever-increasing fame, at last became reconciled to what they had been unable to prevent. It had to be acknowledged that Karl Theodor was the foremost operator for cataract and had, moreover, made hitherto unknown improvements in the operation.

In 1895 Dr. Heinrich Zenker, at that time his assistant, was able to publish a “Report on 1,000 operations for cataract, performed in 3 years by

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Duke Karl Theodor." One can imagine the joy and pride with which Duchess Elisabeth (then nineteen) turned over the pages, especially as Dr. Zenker had not omitted to mention the mother of the young Princess, Duchess Maria Josepha, "who in the operating theatre was an example to assistants as well as to nurses."

The admiration she felt for her father and mother gave additional stimulus to the ambition of Elisabeth and urged her to achieve something on her own account.

X.

THE Duke had three hospitals, one in Munich at 43, Nymphenburgerstrasse, another on the Tegernsee, and the third at Meran. These hospitals were not only a means of relieving a greater number of cases, but their establishment in three different localities was the only way of solving a problem of almost unsurmountable difficulty. The health of the Duke had always been very frail, and it was impossible for him to live in Munich all the year round. He spent the spring there ; then, in the summer,

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he went to the Tegernsee, to breathe the pure mountain air and the refreshing fragrance of the pine forests ; and Meran, in Tyrol, was his winter residence.

In each of these places, therefore, he established a hospital where he could take up his work at any time. It is reckoned that he treated 800 in-patients in a year and more than 5,000 out-patients ; and that he performed about 250 operations for cataract. He must, in his lifetime, have performed about 5,000.

It goes without saying that such a man must have known in a more than ordinary degree, the value of time. This faculty, like all the rest, was transmitted to Duchess Elisabeth. Besides the numerous duties and occupations imposed on her by her birth and for which the days of a princess are usually all too short, she carried on at the same time as her medical studies that of the violin, an instrument needing long and strenuous application. And as it seems to be a fundamental principle with this splendid woman to do a thing well or not do it at all, it is not surprising that she should have become an excellent violinist.

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To return to her father. His health had always required the greatest consideration, yet the amount of work he accomplished was enormous. Not content with his regular occupations, as long as the Empress Elisabeth was alive, he went every year to Vienna, where he visited the hospitals of the great ophthalmologists.

In the books of these establishments there is frequently the entry : “ *Dux fecit* ” or “ *F.I. fecit* ” (the Duke, or the Brother of the Empress, performed the operation), although the patients may not have recognised the famous hand which gave them back their sight.

He also endeavoured continually to introduce the most modern improvements into his hospitals. Little by little they became known as model institutions to which the directors of other hospitals came to learn how to improve their own.

But what always most astonished the numerous visitors was the immense number of operations performed by the famous surgeon. In his Munich hospital the nursing staff consisted of Sisters of Mercy, and the Superior, Sister Catherine, used to show with pride an enormous

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glass jar containing more than three thousand crystalline lenses removed by the Duke himself. And it was good to see the air with which she would add :

“No one could imagine the perfection to which he has brought his art. Ah, he is indeed a benefactor to humanity!”

XI.

IN all the foregoing we can trace the noble example on which was formed the character of the Duchess Elisabeth. She inherited all the remarkable qualities of her father. But there was an even nobler virtue conspicuous in the life of this admirable man, which I have left to the last ; his unequalled and inexhaustible charity.

And here it is well to remember the great wealth he had inherited, the splendid use he made of it and its consequent influence on the spiritual growth of Princess Elizabeth.

The favourite clients of this celebrated surgeon were the poor, who were admitted gratis to his hospitals and treated there without any fee.

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His fame attracted, from all parts of Germany and Austria, crowds of patients who literally besieged his consulting room, and who went away blessing him.

In the remote corners of Tyrol the peasants knew no other means of curing their ailments than those suggested by superstition or by quack remedies, a doctor being even more formidable to them than any disease. But with *Dr. Karl*, or *Dr. Duke*, as he let them call him, it was quite a different thing. They trusted him and were not afraid to undergo his operations. When, in his drives or rides he encountered one of his patients tilling the soil or watching his flocks, he would stop his carriage or his horse and enquire after his health, and slip a coin into his hand, advising him not to work too hard nor do anything foolish. Not only were the consultations of *Dr. Karl* gratis, but also the whole treatment and the necessary drugs and medicines. The poorest even received sufficient help to enable them not to have to work during convalescence.

All doctors cannot treat their patients in this manner, for wealth like his is rare, but anyone might take pattern by his self-denial. At any

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hour, at any moment, he was ready, just as if he were a small country surgeon, eager to make himself a practice. And this was because he looked upon the exercise of his art as a sacred vocation.

Although a philosopher and a *savant* in every sense of the word, he was, all his life, deeply religious ; thus giving the lie to those who assert that religion and science are incompatible. The exemplary life of this good man, his unceasing toil, his clear-sighted and enlightened charity were an example to the whole of his family. To Elisabeth it became second nature. The good seed, lovingly sown in such a fertile and well prepared soil, was soon to yield an abundant harvest.

XII.

AS though his military duties (he was a General and also Colonel of two regiments bearing his name), his offices at the Court of Munich, and his work as surgeon and administrator of his hospitals were not enough to fill up his time, Duke Karl Theodor managed to find some leisure, which was not only

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well-deserved but necessary. He was able to devote time to the Arts, chiefly to music ; and Queen Elisabeth must look back with mingled pleasure and regret to the long rides her father loved to take with her in the beautiful woods near the Tegernsee.

At twenty-four she was, though still a girl, a highly-accomplished princess, and had been many times asked in marriage. But she was disinclined to give up her quiet, happy, useful life. On the other hand, her parents were in no hurry to part with their beloved daughter.

However, a day came when for this young girl everything was changed, when one single thought drove out all others, when a tenderer light shone from her eyes and her smiling lips betrayed the happiness of her heart ; when she was conscious of impulses which made her fearlessly confront the idea of separation from the parental roof. Her inmost soul was steeped in glamour.

At the beginning of the year 1900 Prince Albert of Belgium visited Munich and wrought this momentous change in the heart of Duchess

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Elisabeth. In June the betrothal was publicly announced.

The Prince obviously saw no necessity for a long delay and the marriage was fixed for the 10th July, the same date as the wedding of Duchess Marie Gabrielle, the younger sister of Elisabeth, with Prince Rupprecht, heir to the throne of Bavaria.

But the death of the Princess Dowager, Josephine, of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, the maternal grandmother of Prince Albert, postponed the ceremony until the 2nd October.

If it is true that the period of betrothal is the happiest in life, the young couple cannot have regretted that it was prolonged. For whatever may have been the political reasons which led to this union, it is betraying no secret to say that these two young people loved each other sincerely.

XIII.

THE Princess was proud of the tall, handsome lover, by whose side she looked quite small. He had youth, intelligence and depth of character. He seemed serious-

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mind and armed for the battle of life with all the qualities she could have hoped to find in a husband. But above all she was pleased to see the deference with which he looked up to Duke Karl Theodor and the interest he took in the professional work of his future father-in-law. With this discovery came a change in Elisabeth herself. Her countenance became even more sweet and lovable, and her voice took on the caressing tone which to those who are privileged to hear it is "as sweet as music."

Already she saw her *fiancé* occupying himself with her for the welfare of their future subjects. Together they sketched out plans for improving hospitals, enlarging schools, founding asylums and convalescent homes, and her life became bound up in his.

But their time was not entirely devoted to such ideas. The hours which the betrothed pair spent in rowing on the Tegernsee, or in music, were no less delightful. The Prince, seeing so much charm joined to so much perfection of mind, so much profound learning hidden beneath childlike vivacity, and a heart so filled with goodness, love and charity, must have felt infinite

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gratitude towards the destiny which had bestowed on him such a companion.

XIV.

THE announcement of the betrothal was very favourably received in Belgium, where much was expected from the daughter of Karl Theodor. People set to work at once to prepare a royal wedding present for the young couple. The wife of the Minister of Finance, Mme. de Smet de Naever, was at the head of a committee formed for this object. More than a hundred thousand francs was quickly collected. But to give a present its full value, it must be something really acceptable. Not knowing what to choose, the president wrote to Prince Albert, asking him what would best please the Princess. The answer came without delay :

“My *fiancée* and I,” wrote the Prince, “are very grateful to you for your kind intention.... But, however precious in our eyes would be a *souvenir* presented under these circumstances... the dedication of the result of this generous impulse to works of charity would accord still better with our wishes...”

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Except for some short visits to Brussels, Prince Albert passed all the summer in Munich or at the Tegernsee. In Belgium it was earnestly desired that the marriage should take place in the capital, but it is easy to understand the numerous family reasons which decided in favour of Munich.

XV.

EVERY year, in the month of October, Munich has the aspect of a gigantic fair.

It is the Fête of the artists, for whom a single Carnival in the year is not enough. All the year round beer flows freely in Munich, but during the *Oktoberfest* one would suppose that all the sluices were opened, that a deluge of *Hofbräu*, *Spatenbräu*, *Lowenbräu*, and a hundred other *Bräu*, flooded the town on the Isar, and that the overflow of the reservoirs was joyously poured by thousands of *Münchener Kindl* over the gay city. And these are not only the thirstiest days of the year, but the most given up to singing and dancing, and also the noisiest. One can, then, imagine what Munich was like in October 1900.

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All the week before the great event, the town was in a fever. The hotels were filled with the numerous suites of the Kings and Princes who came to grace the ceremony with their presence. The Count and Countess of Flanders arrived among the first, with the Princesses Henriette and Josephine ; then the Princes of Hohenzollern, and many others, without counting the representatives of foreign Courts. All these noble visitors considerably excited the curiosity of the people of Munich and of the Bavarian Highlanders who walked about the streets wearing their Sunday clothes as though for a high Festival.

On the eve of the wedding a great dinner of three hundred covers was given by Duke Karl Theodor at his palace in the *Ludwigstrasse*. Luitpold, Prince Regent of Bavaria, then eighty years old, presided at the banquet. This Prince was, next to Karl Theodor, the best loved man in Bavaria ; the poorer classes used to kneel when he went by as they knelt in church ; for it must not be forgotten how far these villagers have retained their primitive simplicity.

Munich is to Germany something like what

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the Latin Quarter is to Paris. These grown up children of Munich, together with the simple folk from the Highlands, wanted to give, as a farewell to their beloved Princess, a torchlight procession and a monster serenade. The foremost choral societies of the country were massed in front of the palace of Duke Karl Theodor. Each member carried a lighted torch, and the dancing flames were reflected on the instruments and uniforms of the numerous military bands which surrounded them. At the first bars of Beethoven's "Hymn to Joy," sung by the choirs, the large balcony on the first floor was lighted up and the young couple appeared—Prince Albert, from his great height and noble presence, looking truly majestic, the Princess, slight and elegant, with a coronet of diamonds on her magnificent fair hair.

Little by little the balcony was filled. People could distinguish Duke Karl Theodor, tall and thin with a serious face and intellectual forehead, Duchess Maria Josepha, the Count and Countess of Flanders, and lastly the Regent, who spoke a few words to the crowd.

His speech ended as follows :

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“May the dear child who is about to quit the scenes where her infancy was spent, love her new country with an unbounded love. But she must not forget the rustling of our forests, the fresh green on the mountains in the month of May, nor the faithfulness of our Bavarian hearts.”

The royal child has in truth loved her new country with an unbounded love—but what says the rustling of the forests to her now, or the fresh green on the mountains? And where are the faithful Bavarian hearts?

XVI.

THE day of the wedding, Tuesday, the second of October, 1900, dawned brightly.

Elisabeth had a delightful awakening. The morning radiance of earth and sky blended with the dawning happiness in her heart. Everything seemed bathed in sunlight and pervaded with a divine sweetness.

The civil marriage took place in the Royal Palace. Rarely has the Throne Room of white and gold, with its beautiful old Empire furniture, been filled by such a noble and gorgeous

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assembly. When the last name had been signed in the Royal register there was a procession to the Church of All Saints, the *Hofkirche*, where the Archbishop of Munich-Freysing, Monsignor von Stein, was to celebrate the nuptial Mass.

Elisabeth came first. Her dress was quite simple—a gown of white satin, slightly open at the neck, the bodice draped with costly lace; little bouquets of myrtle adorned the long court train, which was carried by a page dressed in blue and white, the Bavarian colours. Her graceful silhouette was etherealised by a tulle veil, covering her from head to foot.

King Leopold, who had arrived that morning, and the Prince Regent were on her right and left. With a spontaneous movement they each took a hand of the Princess, and so she advanced, radiant in youth and beauty, along a path of flowers.

Flowers everywhere—along the route, on the steps, and filling the Church; thousands of candles; the great stained windows transformed by the sunshine into dazzling jewels; the music of the Chapel Royal, the sanctity of the place, the magnitude of the occasion; the happy

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emotions of a loving heart—the vague yet exquisite tremors filling it at the moment of such a total change in her existence—what unforgettable and sacred memories!

But of all these impressions, the one to be most deeply graven in the memory of the girl who now became a wife, was a clear, resonant voice speaking noble words, solemn and charged with emotion—a voice which seemed to come from another world, the voice of the Archbishop, saying :

“By the will of God, Prince, you will one day wear a crown. May your renown spread far and wide! And you, princely bride, may you be known as the benefactress of the poor, the refuge of the afflicted, the shining embodiment of Christian charity.”

And in the sunlight and the solemn silence arose the fervent prayer :

“O Lord, build up his house and his kingdom to be a temple of the Spirit, of the fear of God, of Charity and of Peace.”

The impression created by this address was profound, and all eyes were filled with tears.

What would not have been the incredulity,

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the amazement and horror of all these kings and princes, if for one instant the veil of the future could have been lifted before them !

No longer an Altar, resplendent with candles and flowers, but a desolate country—heaps of smoking ruins, demolished towns, and every possible form of human suffering. No more the stately tones of the organ, nor heavenly voices rousing their auditors to ecstasy, but the dismal sound of cannon accompanying the agonised groans of murdered victims and the cries of the wounded imploring help. No more priests' vestments of gold and lace, nor choristers clad in gorgeous scarlet, but dim forms moving in shadow, a band of soldiers covered with mud and drenched to the skin, poor wretches displaying the horrors of their injuries—hands and feet shattered and maimed. In place of the rich stained glass of the apse, thousands of windows lit up by frightful conflagrations ; instead of fragrant clouds of incense floating up to Heaven, bursts of dense russet smoke rising from a furnace of crimson flame, as though fanned by gigantic bellows. The earth is no longer earth, but a limitless sea—a sea of blood ; and in the

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fiery glow, in the midst of the devastated plain, soldiers drag their weary steps. One among them is taller by a head than his companions. He sees them harassed and almost dead with hunger and fatigue, and he re-animates them by his example. Grimed with powder, he watches the approach of the enemy, his rifle still hot and smoking. A woman, darkly clad as though in mourning, stands close to him, her hand in his. She, too, watches the hostile crowd spreading slaughter as it advances, and her blue eyes are filled with terror. Guns are heard in the distance ; she starts and reels, not from fear, but stricken by intolerable grief. And hiding her face on the shoulder of the man beside her, clinging convulsively to his breast, she sobs : “ Tell me, oh tell me, they are *not* Bavarians ! ”



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PART II.

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SECOND PART.

PRINCESS ALBERT.

I.

IN the castle on the Tegernsee, so full of early associations, Elisabeth spent the first few days of her life as a married woman. But it was not so much that she began a new existence as that she severed herself from the old one. She looked, so to speak, for the last time with the eyes of a girl on her beloved mountains and valleys, on the lake and the forests ; she listened just once more to the dear familiar voices. When she came back, she knew she would not be the same. But what would she be like ? In what respect would her outlook have changed ?

In spite of her perfect happiness, a certain timidity possessed her—not only because of all she had to leave behind her, but because she instinctively recognised how little she really knew of the man with whose destiny her own life was

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linked "for better, for worse" ; who was taking her away to an unknown land, some day to be Queen over a people to whom she was a foreigner. With a thrill she remembered other Queens, great and famous Queens, who, arriving as foreigners in the country where they were to reign, had indeed found a throne, but had never ceased to be aliens. And she prepared herself for a struggle, little dreaming of the far greater struggle of another kind which was in store for her.

Another thing disquieted the young wife. How many suitors, after presenting themselves to their future wives in the illusive guise of a Prince Charming, had thrown aside the pleasing mask before there had been even a taste of happiness — a risk which every girl must face but which particularly threatens princesses, in whose marriages reasons of state generally play a certain part ; a risk doubly great for Princess Elisabeth (or, as we must now call her, Princess Albert) whose somewhat virile traits had been intensified by an education which had certainly not prepared her for life by the side of an uncongenial husband.

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Happily fate had taken this into account, and foreseeing the heavy burden in store for her, had decreed that until the hour of her supreme trial her path should be strewn with roses.

II.

HOURS of leisure are grudgingly granted to princes. The joyous entry into Brussels was arranged to take place as early as the 7th October. Besides, Prince Albert was impatient to display his treasure to the Belgians.

The Princess attracted everyone at first sight by her extreme distinction and grace, being very slender, of middle height, with refined features and a clear-cut profile, soft blue eyes, shadowed by a mass of bright chestnut hair dressed low on her brow, a straight nose and an amiable mouth. The lower part of her face is rather pointed, imparting her an expression half mischievous, half earnest. Photographs do not give a correct idea of her physiognomy, for they represent her as serious and pensive, omitting the livelier aspect which is frequently to be seen in the original.

She had no sooner arrived in Belgium than

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she gave evidence of this overflowing vivacity. Instead of remaining cold and apathetic and looking as if she were undergoing a penance (at times it must be anything but amusing to be for entire days the observed of all observers) she showed her interest in everything new.

Everybody was charmed with her freedom from affectation. At Liège, where she entered Belgium, and where the first reception was held, Prince Albert had to review the Town Guard, which was paraded in full uniform. The Princess was about to follow him, but her ladies-in-waiting respectfully restrained her, pointing to a group of young girls who were about to present her with flowers. She asked regretfully : " Must I really stay ? Can't I go, too ? "

Evidently it had not taken Prince Albert long to make himself indispensable ; but this did not prevent the Princess from receiving the little deputation with perfect graciousness.

In Brussels, in front of the Bourse, she watched a procession of troops and children and various Societies, which lasted several hours. The children wore pretty commemorative medals, and *La Brabançonne* was sung. Societies, one

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after another, marched past. The Princess was greatly impressed, and could not help remarking to Monsieur de Mot, the Burgomaster, that she had never supposed that Brussels could contain so many. As a matter of fact, the good city has enough Societies to satisfy the needs of two capitals of ordinary dimensions.

At the Hotel de Ville she was not in the least awed by the grave personages who surrounded her, but went from one to another, talking, and asking questions of the city fathers in so sweet a voice and with so much simplicity that they felt themselves bound for ever to this fascinating and bewitching little Princess. At her first appearance she delighted everyone, and she became the idol of the people of Brussels.

After the reception at the Hotel de Ville the crowd outside insisted on seeing their Princess, and Prince Albert led her out upon the balcony. There was a burst of cheering, and Elisabeth—partly by a happy inspiration, and partly carried away by the dawning affection she felt for the people — *her* people henceforth — impulsively kissed her hands to them. The crowd felt and understood how strong was the feeling which

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prompted this action. Their enthusiasm thereupon turned to delirium, and their cheers became like peals of thunder. The spontaneous affection which she won at that moment is still rooted in every heart.

III.

THREE days later, when the first official receptions were over, the young couple departed for Italy to continue their honeymoon. There, little by little, Elisabeth acquired a fuller knowledge of the husband whom destiny had bestowed upon her, hand in hand with whom she would one day climb the steps of the temple of immortal glory.

Some women might have felt shy, and perhaps ill at ease, by the side of Albert of Belgium. Only a mind of a high order could estimate at his full value this grave, well-informed, silent young man, with his serious and thoughtful air. The Belgians themselves, for a long time, misunderstood him. They took his seriousness for timidity, his composure for indifference. For it never occurred to him to pose before the people: as long as he was not yet King, his only thought

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was to learn to fit himself for the task awaiting him. To many he might have seemed too austere, but probably it was this side of his character which attracted Elisabeth. His thoughtful brow and blue eyes recalled to her the studious air and powerful influence of her father; and because her father—though so kind, so gay at times, so interested in every form of Art—had a look of calm severity, she had divined in her fiancé all those splendid qualities of heart and mind which were to shine with such brilliant radiance in days to come.

It was often a matter of wonderment that the heir of Leopold II.—a monarch who was jealous of his rights, and who always spoke of himself in the third person to his attendants (for instance: “Georges, the King is going out; bring him his hat”)—should be of such a liberal and democratic turn of mind. It was perhaps due to the fact that he had not always been destined for the throne. This has led to his love of simplicity, of which the following incident may be taken as an illustration. It happened, I believe, in 1909.

Albert is a first rate engineer, not only in

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theory, but also in practice. He can drive a motor car and repair it like an ordinary chauffeur. Once, however, in Tyrol, he had a serious breakdown, for the roads in that country are very trying. It was growing dark ; the Prince began to feel hungry. He was quite alone, and in the increasing darkness he saw the lights of Trient appearing one by one. He left his car to the care of the stars and went on foot to seek for supper and assistance. Supper being the more pressing need, he entered a hotel to which he had been directed. But at the sight of this rather unsightly mechanic the head waiter refused him admittance to the dining room — only *gentlemen in evening dress* were allowed there. The Prince, without any comment, turned away and went to the refreshment room at the station, where he was more hospitably received. It was characteristic of him that he did not even take the trouble to enlighten the Cerberus of the hotel. Had he only disclosed his name it is quite certain that all the *gentlemen in evening dress* would have been brushed aside to make room for him. But evidently, even a Prince may have his pride.

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IV.

THE sun, whose presence is said to be indispensable at all happy marriages, had not failed to shine on the wedding of Albert and Elisabeth. His rays had been like so many presages of the felicity which was to be read in their faces when, at the end of six weeks, they quitted Italy to return to Brussels.

The Princess set to work at once, quietly and seriously, to make herself a home, and to serve her apprenticeship for her future position. This was the beginning of a succession of years of ideally delightful intimacy in which the husband and wife were able to lead a life which was relatively tranquil and retired. King Leopold's extreme activity prevented the burden of state from weighing heavily on the young shoulders of Prince Albert; and the presence at fêtes, galas and Thanksgiving Te Deums of the Queen, the Countess of Flanders and Princess Clementine, made that of Princess Albert unnecessary.

It may seem strange that the young Princess so quickly found herself at home in Brussels in such different surroundings and with such a complete change of customs. Brought up in

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Bavaria, where the most insignificant attendant at Court has a title, and is greeted with obsequious respect, where Royalty is still held to be by Divine Right, she had become the future Queen of a country where the King calls his subjects "fellow citizens." And lovely as were the landscapes and woods of Belgium, they were not crowned by the majestic summits of the Alps.

But the fact that Duke Karl Theodor had brought up his daughter to despise the vainglory of royalty and power, made it easier to face these changed conditions. To become a Queen meant to her greater opportunities for being useful. With such lofty impulses she was certain to find a home in the hearts of all those with whom she came in contact.

The first to be won were her new relations.

V.

THE Kingdom was at that time in the enjoyment of great prosperity under a King who was very tenacious of his prerogative, very resolute, an extraordinarily good man of business, a great financier, and as crafty as a Normandy peasant.

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Leopold II. was, though sometimes the contrary is asserted, extremely popular. The death of his only son, Leopold, had permanently embittered his character. It was a trial to him to have no direct heir, and, perhaps without intending it, he visited his disappointment on his entourage. Queen Marie Henriette, whose health was very delicate, led a rather retired life, chiefly at Spa or at Laeken. Of their three daughters one only remained at the Court of Brussels, Princess Clementine, who is now the wife of Prince Victor Napoleon.

As long as he lived King Leopold refused to permit this marriage, thwarting a mutual attachment for long years under the pretext that he feared diplomatic complications with France. Nevertheless, Princess Clementine was his favourite daughter, and conscious, perhaps, of his injustice towards her, he tried to give her some compensations. She was certainly the leading lady in the Kingdom, and took the place of Queen Marie Henriette, who was hardly ever seen in public. During the latter years of his life the King often took his daughter with him on his journeys, for her amusement and diversion.

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VI.

LEOPOLD II. had both a sister and a brother. His sister Charlotte is the widow of Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico. Although she is still alive, her misfortunes, which were only an episode in the stormy history of Mexico, are almost forgotten. As soon as the end of Maximilian's tragic adventure could be foreseen, the poor Empress, a model of conjugal affection, threw herself at the feet of all the sovereigns in Europe, imploring them to save the husband whom they had sent out, by supplying him with money and troops. In vain. *A propos* of one of these despairing attempts, Mérimée wrote indifferently to his friend Panizzi, in August, 1866: "The Empress Charlotte has been at Versailles. They gave her luncheon, but I am afraid they will give her nothing else."

When she knew that the end had come, her grief overcame her reason. She was only twenty-seven when she was so cruelly deprived of the husband she adored. She is now seventy-seven, and nothing remains to her darkened mind but a capacity for suffering. For a long time she has lived at the Château of Bouchout, not far from

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Brussels, where she is surrounded by affectionate care. She has a passion for flowers, and always has them about her ; on her birthday her apartments are absolutely full of them. When she was younger she occupied herself with painting and music. Now she remains motionless for hours, murmuring from time to time one single word, always the same—"Maximilian."

The Count of Flanders, younger brother of Leopold, had married in 1867 Princess Marie Louise of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. They had five children, of whom the eldest, Prince Baudoin, born in 1869, died in 1891. Of their three daughters, one died at an early age ; the second, Henrietta, married the Duke of Vendôme ; while the third, Josephine, married the German Prince, Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. The youngest child of the Count and Countess of Flanders was Albert-Leopold-Clement-Marie-Meinrad, Prince of Belgium, Duke of Saxe, Prince of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, born on the 8th April, 1875, and after 1891 heir-presumptive of Leopold II.

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VII.

AT the time of the death of Prince Baudoin, Albert already had democratic ideas, which he has retained ever since. When he knew that his mission in life would be to rule over a nation, he endeavoured with all his might to prepare himself to fulfil worthily this exalted task. As one of themselves, without pride or regard for his high rank, he mingled with the people, in order to know them better.

I have suggested that this democratic tendency may be ascribed to his position as a younger son. He owes it also to his father, the Count of Flanders, and to his tutor, General Jungbluth.

The General was a Captain in Louvain when the Count of Flanders and some of his friends arrived there one day unexpectedly, causing great excitement in the town and also a good deal of dismay. The illustrious visitors were almost left in the lurch, so great was the fear of making mistakes in etiquette. Captain Jungbluth, seeing that the elders of the city had lost their heads, offered himself to do the honours of Louvain, and showed the royal visitors the Hotel de Ville, and the Library—which no one, alas! will

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ever visit again. The Count of Flanders was so charmed with the unaffected manner and the wide knowledge of the young Captain, that he there and then decided to make him tutor to his sons, the Princes Baudoin and Albert. He never had cause to regret his impulsive choice. The liberal mind of General Jungbluth, the deep learning which was in no way detrimental to his military capacity, and, lastly, his noble and upright character, had the most beneficial influence on the mind of his pupils. Albert was then about thirteen, an age especially susceptible to strong impressions.

His schoolfellows did not feel particularly drawn to the thoughtful, serious boy who worked so conscientiously. On a certain occasion, some breach of discipline had been committed in class, insignificant in itself, but of the kind which, in a military school, might involve expulsion. The master called upon the culprit to declare himself, but no one gave a sign. Then Prince Albert was seen to rise. In his rather drawling voice, he said simply : "I did it."

The culprit was saved, as the Prince intended he should be. But what he had no idea of was

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that in this little world of budding soldiers he had won an ever-increasing popularity. It was his first victory.

And this is how the boys of his year became really his comrades. One Sunday, for some trifle, all the class was kept in. The weather was splendid, and the disappointment all the more severe. The Prince, naturally, was exempted from the punishment, but he had very definite ideas about the word *justice*. Soon despair, weather, expeditions, all were forgotten by the prisoners, for in the morning they saw the Prince arrive, enter the class room quietly and seat himself in his usual place to take his share of the penance. And the day which was expected to be so dreary, became after all a pleasant memory.

VIII.

PRINCE ALBERT, a quiet, peaceable man, who prefers sitting in a boat on the Lake of Vossem and fishing all day to joining the grandest shooting parties, showed from his childhood a great interest in military matters. This inclination is not entirely due to the

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instructions of his teachers, for the Count of Flanders, in his youth, had been enthusiastic for a soldier's career.

Albert's first public utterance (February 1897) was on "The Russian Army and the German Manœuvres." His second (1898) was on "The Future of Non-Commissioned Officers." At his accession he commented with great satisfaction on the fundamental reform which had been accomplished in the Belgian Army, personal service.

"Belgium," said he, "can count upon a patriotic, reliable and numerous Army, an indispensable element in the inviolability of her independence."

At every opportunity the King increased and reinforced this Army, to the great surprise and often contrary to the wishes of the Government. "Belgium is a pacific nation," they told him. "Her welfare and her future are based on her industrial development, her commerce, her splendid Colony. A large army would be a useless burden."

The King would not be convinced; he insisted that this little corner of earth, so rich, so

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industrious, so fertile, so splendidly situated, was a rich prey for a greedy neighbour, and they must be on the watch. Was there not a story of our childhood in which little Hop-o'-my-Thumb discovers that the ogre has smelt fresh meat?

But at the time of the marriage of Albert and Elisabeth the ogre was asleep, or rather was still hidden, and all was peace and happiness and love.

IX.

IN those days the young man, destined to become the most conspicuous and the most popular King in the world, might have been seen walking like an ordinary person in the woods about the Tegernsee or beside the lake, pleasantly greeting the rustics, who knew him already, and were inclined to owe him a grudge for taking their dear Princess so far away from them. If by nothing else, anyone could tell by their manner of greeting the village people that the husband and the father of Elisabeth held the same political and social views. Their love of science was equally remarkable, but Duke Karl

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Theodor had been able to specialise in his favourite study, whereas the Prince, whose first duty was to his country, undertook the difficult task of learning as much as possible of everything. Had he been a private individual he might perhaps have been famous as a military engineer or as an inventor. But under other circumstances he acquired a profound knowledge of all technical sciences. Engineers, mechanics, architects, men of commerce, professors and artists all agree in saying that he has a thorough knowledge of their particular branch.

Just as the influence of Karl Theodor had so wonderfully developed the mind of Duchess Elisabeth, so also the character of her husband gave an equal stimulus to the mind of Princess Albert.

“Happy people have no history,” says an old proverb. As most Kings have a history few can be happy, but at any rate, for ten years our Prince and Princess were happy, and had none. It is pleasant to picture them in their palace in the *Rue de la Science*, studying together, interrupting their reading with interesting discussions, ending the evening with an hour of music,

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untroubled by thoughts of future royalty, content with the present. They gave their patronage to various societies, visited many exhibitions, were present at numerous services commemorating sad or joyful events, and often went to Bavaria or Tyrol, where the Prince made excursions while the Princess remained at Possenhofen or the Tegernsee.

X.

THREE times, however, the Princess was obliged to interrupt her ordinary occupations, and during the period of rest rendered necessary by the state of her health, her beautiful, slender hands were busied with the making of some dainty little cap or tiny robe of ribbon and lace. And in November 1901 the arrival of a new heir presumptive was announced.

The Princess had spent the summer at Possenhofen. She remained there until the 26th September, and Duchess Maria Josepha returned with her to Brussels. The feelings of a young wife about to be a mother for the first time are of unalloyed happiness, and the dear little creature given by God is joyfully welcomed

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by both father and mother. But for a royal Princess it is different. If one of them were ever to write her true and faithful memoirs she would tell how those days of waiting were filled with painful anxiety. The State demands a Prince, it must be a Prince, a Prince at all costs !

A hundred and one guns announce the arrival of one of these much desired Princes ; twenty-one the birth of a mere Princess. On the morning of the 3rd November the heart of everyone in Brussels stood still when the first guns were heard, and they waited, speechless with suspense, counting the reports which followed each other slowly—19, 20, 21.....a pause, due perhaps to a spice of mischief on the part of the gunners ; but before there was time for faces to be clouded, a triumphant shot burst forth—22 ! It was a boy ! No need to count any more. Every one rejoiced, laughing, talking, embracing. It was a Prince. What luck ! Hurrah !

The Belgian people really love their Royal Family. They themselves chose their form of Government and the Kings, and their confidence has not been misplaced. The little Prince was therefore hailed with sincere joy, which was a

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triumph for the young mother, whose popularity was at once trebled.

People heard with breathless interest that the Prince weighed 7 lbs.; that his doctor was Dr. Max, and that he had been entrusted to Madame Schwalb. He was christened Leopold-Philippe-Charles - Albert-Meinrad-Hubertus-Marie-Miguel, after all his godfathers and godmothers. King Leopold seems to have had a great affection for the Princess, which was all the more gratifying since it was rarely bestowed. Anyway, he showed himself delighted at the event, and presented the young mother with four diamond brooches, worth 120,000 francs, and a few days later, on the 19th November, St. Elisabeth's Day, he gave her a set of enormous turquoises and diamonds, equally valuable.

Presents and telegrams flooded the palace in *Rue de la Science*, numerous pardons were granted (about two thousand), and large sums of money were bestowed on the poor and on charitable institutions. Everyone had to share the joy of the happy parents.

One present, which must have particularly pleased the Princess, was a marvellous cushion

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of embroidery and lace, given in gratitude for one of those acts of kindness of which she was always so lavish. The previous summer she had sent, at her own expense, a certain number of young girl patients from the Hospital of St. Pierre to the seaside to complete their cure. To shew their gratitude to the "little Queen," as she was already called, the mothers of these girls determined to execute a piece of work worthy of her for whom it was intended.

XI.

DURING the autumn of 1903 another happy event was expected in the Royal Family.

Prince and Princess Albert had been as usual to Possenhofen, and returned to Brussels at the end of September. A few days later, on the 10th October, Prince Charles-Théodore-Henri-Antoine-Meinrad was born.

To complete the family, a little girl was wanted. In July 1906, Princess Elisabeth was at Ostend, staying at the Villa Osterrieth, which was always one of her favourite dwelling places. Instead of going to Bavaria as in former

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summers, she had remained this time in Belgium. Probably the birth of Prince Charles Théodore so soon after her return from Possenhofen had prompted the fear that a Prince might be born elsewhere than in Belgium, and to avoid complications, Ostend was chosen as a summer residence.

There, in the month of August, 1906, the birth of Princess Marie-José-Charlotte-Henriette-Sophie was joyfully announced. The wishes of the parents as well as of the nation were now fulfilled. Prince and Princess Albert, as usual, hastened to share their happiness with others. They gave large donations to Dr. Lust, the Director of the *Goutte de Lait*, which had been founded for the protection of young children. To each of five children born to fisher people at Ostend on the same day as Marie José, Elisabeth sent a good round sum to be placed in their names in the savings bank.

The young mother was much occupied with her three little ones, to whose welfare she devoted herself like any simple *bourgeoise*. Soon, however, Prince Leopold and Prince Charles had to be handed over to tutors and governors and the

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fascinating little Marie José, her baby, was left alone on the knees of her mother.

XII.

PRINCE ALBERT had been direct heir to the throne since 1905, the Count of Flanders having died on the 17th November in that year. Though his death must have been an irreparable loss to Prince Albert, it was hardly noticed in the public and political life of the country. He had lived quite apart from public affairs, detesting all the parade of royalty. And when, in 1866, he was offered the throne of Rumania, he declined it, preferring to remain in Belgium. He had a passion for books. His unique library was full of rare editions, splendidly bound; it was his greatest pride and his only luxury. He loved his home, which had been made beautiful by the taste and artistic skill of the Countess. They both loved to receive there, without ceremony, the men of letters and famous artists who visited Brussels. Among the valuable pictures in the reception rooms were etchings bearing the signature of the

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hostess, and in no way unworthy of the collection, which depicted charming landscapes on the banks of the Semois.

The Count of Flanders used to rise at four or five and inspect his little domain. He always went about on foot unless the distance were too great, and was never present at public functions if he could avoid it. It is said that once, on the occasion of a solemn *Te Deum* (a *Te Deum* is an important affair in Brussels), the Count of Flanders was seen in the very front of the crowd, being elbowed right and left, and enjoying himself like a child. He watched the carriages of the Court passing in procession, his blue eyes sparkling with mischief. His family was devoted to him, and felt his loss most keenly.

The Countess of Flanders survived him for seven years. She had never recovered from the death of Prince Baudoin, and twice a week a Requiem Mass was celebrated in his room, which has been turned into a chapel. She was an admirable mother, and filled a difficult position with tact and discretion.

XIII.

AT the end of 1908 a rumour began to run through Belgium that Prince Albert was about to undertake a journey to the Congo.

“It is a land of immense resources,” said one, “of incomparable resources. It is very great and very rich.”

“Yes,” said another, shaking his head, “but there are dangers, you know—— and the climate.”

“Bah,” answered the first, “that can’t be so terrible! The proof of that is that the Prince has already asked for a route to be traced out.”

“So I have heard, but it will only be the very easiest one.”

All this was perfectly true. The Prince wished to see the Colony for himself, and the official route was —— absolutely useless.

Now it happened that the explorer Buttgenbach was at that time giving a lecture on the unexplored regions of Katanga. The Prince was present at the lecture, and made up his mind on the spot. He would leave the famous route to official tourists. As for himself, he would go

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and explore Katanga, and would cross on foot the 900 miles of Congo bush.

Thereupon the rumours increased and the Belgians talked of nothing but colonisation, cannibals, virgin soil, wild beasts, and, as a refrain, the perils of the climate.

Princess Elisabeth fully shared these apprehensions. An expedition to the Congo could not be free from great risks, and she knew that beneath the calm exterior of her husband lay a genuine passion for adventure. During a recent visit to Switzerland he had not been content with the ordinary pleasures of a tourist, but had climbed some of the highest peaks, and had brought back from these expeditions photographs which had greatly alarmed the Princess.

But apart from the dangers of the unexplored Congo he would be absent for a long time, and they had never been separated for more than a fortnight. Everyone knew the deep affection of Elisabeth for her husband, and grieved for the anxiety which she would feel. So the matter was not pressed, for it seemed almost better to abandon the great enterprise than to cause her the slightest pain. Missives reached him from

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all parts. The most touching were letters written by school children to their "Dear Albert," assuring him that they would pray for him. Others contained scapularies or consecrated medals, which the Prince was entreated to wear so that he might be preserved from all harm. But there were also letters advising him not to risk himself in such an adventure, but to think of his wife, of his children, of a whole nation in anxiety.

The Princess never put the slightest obstacle in the way of the journey ; she recognised her duty, as always, and had the strength to do it. She accompanied her dear explorer as far as London, where he embarked on the *Armada* Castle.

Long days of separation now began for the young wife. In her mind were the ever-recurring questions : "Where is he ? What is he doing ?" Occupation was certainly not lacking for the future Queen. She had accepted the presidency of the section dealing with Women's Arts and Crafts at the International Exhibition, which was to open in 1910, and was already in course of erection. She also paid several official visits to

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Exhibitions in Antwerp and Ostend, and after spending some time with her children at the Château of La Fougeraie, she went to Bavaria to be near her sister, Princess Rupprecht, whose health was not satisfactory.

All this time the Prince was in Africa, making new friends. People were greatly impressed with the good sense and wide knowledge of this pleasant, unaffected young man, who took such a keen interest in everything. And it is curious that it was an African newspaper which first uttered the prophetic words : “ Albert of Belgium is destined to become one of the most popular Sovereigns in Europe.”

King Albert would certainly be the last to desire such universal admiration as has since fallen to his lot. Nevertheless it has been deservedly bestowed upon him, and the prediction of the obscure African paper is fulfilled.

XIV.

AT last the time came when the people of Belgium were rejoiced by the safe return of their Prince. Innumerable stories were told of hazardous fighting, wonderful adventures,

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and also of excellent results. This journey gratified the materialistic tendency of the people, at the same time bringing home to them new ideals. In a word, it was a success.

One can imagine the delight of the Princess, not only at seeing her husband again, but also in the great future possibilities for the nation which were revealed by the exploration of the Congo.

Unfortunately, in the midst of her happiness, Elisabeth sustained a cruel blow.

Duke Karl Theodor, whose health had for a long time given cause for anxiety, began to suffer from acute nephritis. His daughter hastened at once to his side. The Duke was at the Tegernsee, but he was removed to Kreut where he would be near some famous medicinal springs, and where it was considered he could have better treatment. Prince Albert also came to Kreut and stayed until the 11th November, when he took the Princess back to Brussels. The danger seemed to have passed away, and it was believed to have been a false alarm. But a fortnight later they were recalled by a telegram. They returned to Kreut, where the family had already assembled. Duchess Marie Josepha, as in many previous

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attacks, devoted herself, indefatigable to the last, to nursing the husband whose bedside she had not quitted for many a long week.

The Duke died on the 30th November. There was public mourning all over Bavaria, where the populace wept as for a beloved father, and overwhelming sorrow filled the heart of the daughter he had loved so fondly.

Duke Karl Theodor was no more, yet he had bequeathed to her the greatness of his soul which would live after him in glorious immortality.

XV.

AFTER the funeral, Elisabeth remained in the midst of her own people, plunged in grief. The Prince would not leave her side.

Suddenly, on the 10th December, another fateful telegram arrived, this time from Brussels —King Leopold was seriously ill.

The Prince and Princess returned in haste. The King was confined to his bed, and the doctors gave little hope. Intestinal paralysis

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was a serious thing, especially at his age, and the royal patient was aware of this. King Leopold had never accepted the idea of death with resignation. When surprise was expressed at his restless moving from place to place, he used to say, smiling :

“At my age it is well to be constantly travelling about, so that if Death calls on you, you won't be ‘at home.’”

But when Death came, Leopold looked him courageously in the face. And it was really “at home” that Death found him, in the little *Pavillon des Palmiers* at the Château of Laeken, where he almost always lived when he was in Belgium. He died on the 17th December, 1909, in the night, and, let me repeat, the King who had loved Belgium so fervently was universally and deeply regretted by his people.

So it was that, saddened by a double grief, Elisabeth became Queen. Yet she did not become a Queen at once. In France, when France was a monarchy, and in other kingdoms in the present day, “*le roi est mort, vive le roi !*” But in this exceptional little country of Belgium it is not so. The heir of the dead King is not

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recognised as a King himself until he has taken the Constitutional Oath.

On the 23rd December, 1909, Prince Albert of Belgium took the Oath and became Albert I., King of the Belgians.



PART III.

THIRD PART.

QUEEN OF THE BELGIANS.

I.

WE have seen, in the first part of this little book, how, during her youth, the character of Duchess Elisabeth developed under the beneficent influence of her parents, especially of her father. These early years saw the dawn of her all-embracing charity, her love of science, her desire for a useful life, and her delight in music.

Then we noted that, during the ten happy years which followed her marriage, the character of Princess Albert remained unaltered. At the side of her husband she retained all the qualities acquired in her girlhood. In a new country, in new surroundings, she was the same Elisabeth.

In figure she was supple and graceful ; her blue eyes, slightly shadowed by the mass of her fair hair, reflected a deep seriousness, though a smile often lit up the gravity of her face.

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At the end of this second period we see her as the perfect type of the brilliant and highly-educated woman of to-day, the woman who plays outdoor games and so prolongs her youth, who in her activities is almost the equal of a man, and who can be doctor or lawyer as occasion arises. Just as Augusta Victoria is the most out of date and old-fashioned of royal ladies, Elisabeth is the most modern. And what has enabled her to subjugate all hearts is the fact that before everything else she is wife and mother—an ideal Queen.

We have said that during these ten years her character had remained unaltered. We shall now see that from the time when she became Queen a new development began which has culminated in the Elisabeth of to-day.

With regard to externals, the change was to be seen in her toilettes. After her accession she was the best dressed Queen in Europe. When she visited Queen Wilhelmina, the Dutch declared that she looked like a Parisian, which was the highest praise they could give. Her preference was for white dresses trimmed with embroidery or lace, and always extremely simple. She loved

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large, soft, feathered hats, and in the evening wore splendid tiaras.

To-day she is to be seen in khaki uniform with a steel helmet to protect her from fragments of shell. Like a modern Joan of Arc, she is clad as a warrior.

II.

ELISABETH became Queen of the Belgians on the 23rd December, 1909, and by the 31st it was evident that she would continue to be what she had been as Princess—good and kind. It had been the custom of Prince and Princess Albert to entertain the children of their household on New Year's Eve, when they showered on them toys and bon-bons and gifts of all kinds before the delighted eyes of their parents, who were also invited to the family party. As King and Queen they did not break through this tradition and, as in previous years, themselves distributed the presents to their little guests.

The Palace at Brussels became the residence of the Royal Family. But King Leopold had neglected it badly, and a great many repairs were

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necessary. Laeken was therefore chosen as a temporary home. The Château had been bought in 1803 by Napoleon, then First Consul, and he stayed there several times with the Empress Josephine. The estate reverted to the Low Countries in 1815, and was purchased by Leopold I. in 1839. It stands in a magnificent park, and the conservatories are justly famous ; but in 1910 the mansion itself lacked comfort, and did not fulfil modern hygienic requirements.

The Queen made no change in her own household, except that Countess Ghislaine de Caraman-Chimay was appointed *Dame d'honneur* and Countess de Henricourt de Grünne *Grande Maîtresse*.

The little Princes had a number of teachers : Mademoiselle Chaland, governess ; Captain Maton, governor ; M. Vital Plas, tutor ; Lieutenant Lancksveert, riding master ; Professor Hennin took charge of their physical development. But the Queen in person superintended their education and helped the children to learn their lessons. She was very proud of their childish beauty, and they were dressed according to her own ideas.

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Royal mothers as a rule are not very imaginative with regard to this matter—a sailor suit for a Prince, a white frock for a Princess, and that is all. The Duke of Brabant and the little Count of Flanders were also sometimes dressed in uniform, but more frequently in a simple dark costume of silk or velvet with a lace collar, which enhanced their fair beauty. As for Princess Marie José, she was a picture to delight an artist, however she was dressed.

III.

THE year 1910 was as brilliant as it was busy for Elisabeth. Her public functions (for instance those in connexion with the Brussels Exhibition) were the easiest, though not the least fatiguing, part of her duties. Another side of her life was full of responsibility, and the Queen was beset by grave anxieties. For when Albert and Elisabeth decided after their accession to make a series of visits to the Sovereigns of Europe, their object was on the one hand to set back as far as possible a conflict by which Europe was already menaced, and on the other to lay the foundation of future alliances.

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One can, therefore, imagine the importance attached to every word uttered by so accomplished and charming a woman ; and one can also understand the uneasiness inspired by the spectre of a coming struggle and of the difficult and tragic part which she would have to play.

At the time when Elisabeth first took up her queenly burden, clouds were beginning to gather which threatened to darken the sky of Belgium. These clouds floated as yet afar off, and were only perceived by a few of the initiated whose business it was to forecast the political future.

Germany, possessing enormous power, acquired as though in a hot house by intensive culture, political, military, and commercial, could no longer control nor limit her ambition.

Spies, members of embassies, even ordinary travellers gifted with moderate powers of observation, all knew what to make of it, but Europe refused to believe them. However, precautions were taken—theoretical precautions, so to speak, which were proclaimed from the housetops so that everyone might be aware of them.

It is remarkable how the German ultimatum

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on the 3rd August, 1914, took the Belgian nation by surprise. Yet, for years they had known that in case of war Belgium was especially threatened.

In 1909 the following appeared in *La France Militaire* :

“If at this moment war were to break out between France and Germany, Belgium would at once be violated. This is the conviction of any one who has followed the evolution of ideas and military institutions in Germany. In case of a European disturbance, what would become of Belgium, at the mercy of the German Empire, which in its school manuals does not hesitate to call Champagne and Burgundy Teutonic countries, and Antwerp, as well as Amsterdam and the Hague, German towns?”

The Belgians, although not believing in an immediate conflict, were not blind to their danger. That would have been difficult, for suspicious persons were daily being caught visiting their forts. German airships floated over Antwerp and Lille, and sometimes ventured to descend, as did Düsseldorf III. at the beginning of 1909. The dirigible contained two men of military aspect who said they were a farmer and a banker

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on their way to Amsterdam, but that the wind had driven them off their course. This lame excuse did not deceive the officers of the fort, who, however, had no authority to detain them as prisoners. They telegraphed to the general in command for instructions. In the meantime the two men had left the Fort of Merxem, where they had landed, and reached Antwerp. They despatched several telegrams to Germany and contrived that nothing compromising should be found in their baggage.

Such things often happened, and representations were made which led to nothing. But by degrees the King had the garrisons and fortified places appreciably strengthened, and there was talk about the defence of the realm. What more could be done? Nothing, except that every possible consideration should be shown to the German Emperor and his envoys so as to avoid the slightest diplomatic complication. The whole of Europe took this course, and for the same reason the first official visit of Albert and Elisabeth was to their formidable neighbour. The King armed himself with all his self control, the Queen with all her charm.

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IV.

BEFORE visiting Berlin, Albert and Elisabeth, on the 24th April, opened the International Exhibition at Brussels. It was a great success. The whole town was hung with flags, and the colours of Belgium, of the Congo, and of Bavaria fluttered gaily in the sunshine ; the air was fragrant with thousands of hyacinths and jonquils. Amid enthusiastic cheers the King and Queen arrived at the Exhibition, and passed on to the immense dome of the *Salle des Fêtes*, to the triumphant strains of the *Brabançonne*. All the Royal Family was present. Conspicuous on the dais was the tall form of the Cardinal of Malines, Monsignor Mercier, surrounded by dignitaries in brilliant uniforms ; numerous speeches were made and heartily applauded, and Baron Janssen, President of the Committee, declared the Exhibition open.

The Royal pair did not confine themselves to this visit ; many others followed, the first of which was to the German section, which was ready, characteristically, long before the others, and which had flown its flag above the town for more than a month. The director of the section

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pointed out that Germany was not showing to Belgium the guns and armoured turrets of Krupp, which might have misled them as to the pacific aims of her powerful neighbour, but that her principal exhibits were toys and musical instruments, products of peace, things which help to make life beautiful.

The visit of a Zeppelin had been announced but, without giving any explanation, Count Zeppelin wrote that his airship would not go to Brussels. Probably he did not wish to alarm the populace. Besides, Zeppelins not being, in those days, loaded with bombs, there was no object in flying over adjoining countries.

However, there was a whole army of little leaden soldiers representing different Belgian regiments, with King Albert at their head—quite a good likeness. The Queen having passed without noticing them, her attention was drawn to the soldiers in miniature. Knowing the Germans as they have since revealed themselves, may one not suppose that they already believed themselves masters of this army?

The French section showed proudly, without misgivings as to what might be said, their magnifi-

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cent 75 mm. gun, already the pride of the French Artillery. And while the King examined it attentively, the Queen went through, with no less interest, the exhibition of Paris fashions.

The other countries were visited in turn. The Belgian section was particularly brilliant. The Brussels Kermesse was the greatest triumph of the whole Exhibition, and the Exhibition itself was the greatest triumph as yet enjoyed by the young King and Queen.

V.

I DO not think it is possible that Elisabeth can ever have had anything in common with William II. The leading characteristics of this great Queen of a small country have their foundations in her love of the people. She, like her husband, King Albert, is thoroughly democratic. It is appropriate that William should be Emperor of Germany and King of Prussia, and that Albert should be King—not of Belgium, but of the *Belgians*. There is a fundamental difference. To-day William must inspire Elisabeth with absolute horror, but even when, in 1910, she

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and the King visited him in Potsdam and Berlin, he cannot have been otherwise than antipathetic. She could not fail to realise that the rôle of a Sovereign must be something more than a continual boisterous effort to astonish the populace. So courteous a woman would naturally be distressed by William's everlasting arrogance. We see now more than ever how the graciousness of the Queen puts to shame the insolent pride of the Kaiser.

I am sure that Elisabeth is too modest ever to have thought of a contrast so much in her favour, but there is no need for me to be so on her behalf, and I rate the smallest of the good works which she has inaugurated far above the ugly and futile *Siegesallée*, or the Saalburg, that grotesque imitation of an old Roman camp which William, believing himself to be, *inter alia*, a re-incarnation of Julius Cæsar, has erected at the cost of millions on a height near Frankfort.

Once again : even if something is deducted on account of flattery on the one hand and affection on the other, from the praise which is lavished on Elisabeth, there still remains sufficient testimony to the fact that she plays the violin extremely

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well ; whereas all through the Empire, in his own family and among his " friends," William's talent for music is an inexhaustible subject for jokes.

Countless delightful anecdotes and pretty stories about the Belgian King and Queen are repeated over and over again ; one never hears the like of the German Emperor and Empress. The punctuality of Albert, " the politeness of a King," is as proverbial as the casualness of William, whose disregard for the convenience of others is illustrated by the following story :

One day HE decided to pay a visit to one of his privileged subjects—an honour which is said to be always a costly one. The *Hofmarschall* arrived several days beforehand at the house chosen by his Imperial master for a brief residence, in order to superintend the preparations. His bedroom had to be furnished in a certain way, and so had his bathroom. Windows and doors were to be hidden by thick curtains, and all staircases and corridors carpeted. The stables were entirely re-arranged and even enlarged—all for a sojourn of forty-eight hours ! Special menus were prepared, and every possible delicacy was procured to please the august palate.

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At the time fixed, William did not arrive. For three days and three nights the kitchens kept up steam, for in similar cases His Imperial Majesty had been known to arrive at three o'clock in the morning, without any regard for the age or the health of his hosts.

At last he came, saw, and approved ; after which he condescended to address his hostess : " Dear Madam, I am very much pleased with my visit, and what has satisfied me most is that you have made no ceremony, but have given your Kaiser 'pot luck.' That is just as it should be, for I should be distressed to give you the slightest trouble "—and so departed.

VI.

IT was this exalted personage who was visited by the King and Queen of the Belgians in the month of June 1910.

They were met at the Potsdam station by the Empress and the Princes, all dressed in black. It rained in torrents. Not a sound penetrated the dense rank of soldiers surrounding the Royal party. The dark dresses, the silence, the uniforms, dis-

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coloured by the downpour, gave an impression of gloom. When the King and Queen arrived, the squadron of Guards gave three hurrahs at regular intervals. The rain never stopped, and the soldiers who lined the streets were hardly distinguishable from the muddy road. The *cortège* proceeded to the *Neue Palais* of Potsdam, where a reception was held in the Shell Room, the room which is decorated, in the worst possible taste, with shells—"which makes it look like an exaggeration of the boxes one can buy for a few pence at the seaside."

After the long journey, the drive through the rain, the nightmare of the Shell Room, the King and Queen must have given a sigh of relief when they were conducted to their own apartments, where tea was served. The Kaiser put in a brief appearance—his only one during the visit of the Royal pair. A boil, which obliged him to keep his arm in a sling, was his excuse for this neglect.

During the two days of their visit the Belgian King and Queen had to be present at two grand reviews (one at Potsdam, the other in Berlin), at which the soldiers had ample opportunity for doing the goose-step in their white trousers. In

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Berlin there were also speeches and demonstrations and banquets.

A few months later, in October, the German Emperor and Empress visited Brussels, at the invitation of Albert and Elisabeth. The Belgians have never shown any cordial liking for the Kaiser, and he only just escaped being hissed. But Queen Elisabeth managed to be always with her guests, so that they might hear sincere and enthusiastic cheering, and take it for themselves.

Nevertheless, the Kaiser did not succeed in making the inhabitants of Brussels appreciate the honour conferred on them by his mere presence in their city. The way he set about it was not exactly a happy one. All the railway stations through which the Imperial couple passed, were closed to the public. When they went to the Exhibition, orders were given that everyone should be turned out of the rooms which they proposed to enter, excepting the German section, where certain persons were permitted to approach them.

The Emperor had sent word to the jewellers of Brussels that he would inspect their show cases. The members of the committee put

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themselves *en grande tenue* and kept the room clear for a whole afternoon—but the Emperor never came. He had signified to the German School that he would pay a visit. All the children, in their Sunday clothes, were ready with a hearty welcome and a profusion of flowers, but waited for him in vain. The Emperor never came.

In many such ways he showed plainly to the Belgian people that he had not come to visit them. The closing of the stations, the clearing of the Exhibition, the delays, countermandings, absences (whether voluntary or not) were so many insults. In his dark soul he must have had, side by side with his contempt, the fear of being divined. He was already sketching out his sinister designs and must have jeered inwardly at these poor innocents and their cordial reception. Perhaps he pictured himself seated beneath the canopy in the Throne Room, surrounded by his gang of pirates and murderers, receiving the humble homage of the King and Queen whom he had robbed of everything.

He has returned—returned to this Palace. He has taken his seat beneath the canopy in the

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Throne Room, surrounded by his pirates and murderers, drunk with bloodshed, exulting in his shameful victories. But his eyes, glancing downward, beheld no kneeling King and Queen. They only saw thousands of corpses. No words of submission reached his ears, only the wails of innumerable victims, crying to the Lord out of the depths into which his infamy had plunged them. He will see them, he will hear them for ever.

And the King and Queen whom he believed to be such an easy prey, still stand triumphant, resisting with a handful of heroes the German Army which was reported invincible and was to annihilate all before it. The huge blood-stained pyramid which William thought to ascend that he might dominate the world, is crushing him with its accursed weight ; and it has become a pedestal for *their* glory.

VII.

THE second official visit of Albert and Elisabeth was to France—not merely to the head of the State, but to the nation. The Parisians had read in the Berlin papers what a

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magnificent reception had been given by William to the King of the Belgians, and they were afraid their own might prove inferior. And yet Paris is more accustomed to entertaining crowned heads than any city in the world. It is true, the programme is always the same ; arrival at the station of the *Bois de Boulogne*, drive along the *Avenue du Bois* and the *Champs Elysées*, installation in the Royal residence. Then visits to the Elysée and Versailles, various receptions, gala night at the Opera, review at Longchamps, and a banquet besides. But what distinguishes and gives its special value to a Parisian reception is the sympathy which is inspired in a greater or less degree by the illustrious visitors and the amount of enthusiasm aroused by them.

The French had a great curiosity to see the King and Queen of the Belgians. They well remembered King Leopold, pacing the *boulevards* with his peculiar gait, buying his newspapers for himself and paying no attention to the crowd. It was known that he desired to be unnoticed, and his wishes were respected.

The reputation of the new King and Queen had preceded them, and people were eager for

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their arrival. They declared the Queen to be pretty and delightful, and her smile bewitching. At the formal reception in the Hotel de Ville there was only one opinion—the Queen was beautiful and her hat most becoming.

As for the King, it was observed that he selected all the colours paraded before the tribune at the Longchamps Review. It was the Fourteenth of July Review, and those who knew the King were not surprised that he should have timed his visit so as to spare the soldiers the double fatigue. When the review was over, the Queen's carriage met a regiment marching with their colours unfurled in front. Obeying one of those charming impulses to which she owes her popularity, Elisabeth stood up to salute it, amid the most frantic cheering. But everywhere she went she aroused the same wild enthusiasm, as the throats of Brussels must know to their cost!

The President of the Republic visited Brussels in his turn. The Emperor of Germany had, of his bounty, sent three thousand francs for the poor of Brussels. Good Monsieur Fallières would not let the country he represented lag behind in

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generosity. Only, with delicacy truly French, he made no allusion to the *poor* of Belgium, fearing to suggest that they abounded in the land. If there were any at all, were they not under the protection of their "good little Queen" ?

But for the charities of the French Colony in Belgium the President sent six thousand francs and ten thousand to the domestic staff of the Royal Palace. To every lady-in-waiting on the Queen and to every officer of the King's household he sent a Sèvres vase. And for the Queen there was a dinner service, also of Sèvres, besides a magnificent piece of Gobelins tapestry representing Winter. Elisabeth was so delighted with these truly royal gifts that she at once ordered four of the most skilful workers in Turnhout to make a scarf of Mechlin lace for Madame Fallières.

VIII.

THERE are married couples who cannot agree, although they may have married for love. They may even have been cousins before being husband and wife. Their disagreements come from too much similarity of

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character, for it is over small details, over trifles, that there are most disputes. In the end they separate because of incompatibility of temper. Then a strange thing often happens. As soon as they are parted they agree perfectly well.

So it has been with Belgium and Holland—no incompatibility of temper since 1830.

In order to prove to Holland the friendly feeling which unites the two countries, Albert and Elisabeth went in September to The Hague, and the strains of the *Wilhelmus* rang out in joyous answer to the *Brabançonne*.

Blue is the prevailing colour in the kingdom of Queen Wilhelmina as well as in her palace. The furniture is blue, the enormous footmen are in blue, the maids wear blue, the Queen's railway-train is blue. Even the landscape is pervaded by a bluish tinge which makes it like a dream country. It is almost as good to see life through a soft blue haze as to see it rose-coloured.

The next journey taken by the King and Queen was to Vienna, more as a family duty than as a political function. For Queen Elisabeth, the favourite niece and god-daughter of the Empress,

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was as much at home in Vienna as in Munich. The receptions were all private except for a state dinner in the *Redouten-Saal* of the *Hofburg*. This vast, tapestried hall, with its stained windows and lofty vaulting, is more like a cathedral than a banqueting room, and three hundred guests look lost in it. On this occasion they were divided into three groups. At the Emperor's table each guest was waited on by a servant whose livery was green and gold, at the table for distinguished persons the servants were in black and gold, and red and gold liveries were worn by the attendants at the table for the officials of the Court. Brilliant lights flashed on the jewelled toilettes of the women and on the glittering uniforms of the men. The service was noiseless, and there was solemn silence while the waltzes of Johann Strauss were played by an orchestra of a hundred performers.

IX.

THE Queen was at Pössenhofen and the King in Tyrol when the terrible news of the fire at the Brussels Exhibition recalled them in haste.

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The conflagration began on the evening of Monday, the 14th August, and in a few moments the buildings were a mass of flames. The Brussels Kermesse was entirely destroyed, besides about twenty houses in the Avenue de Solboch ; the work of three years, chefs-d'œuvres of all kinds, and whole fortunes were swallowed up. There was general consternation and dismay ; all seemed lost. But after the first shock there was a rapid recovery. The ruins were surrounded by a high palisade, painted bright green, which had a cheerful effect and, like industrious ants, the workmen resumed their toil. Reconstruction was already in progress when the King visited the scene of the disaster. His presence gave great encouragement, and by his request the Brussels Kermesse was rebuilt. In a few weeks the Exhibition was restored to its former condition.

An enquiry was made into the origin of the disaster. First of all, at ten minutes to nine little green flames had been seen running along under the roof of the principal entrance to the Belgian section ; in another part of the Exhibition the head of the *Bureau des Postes* stated that at ten

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minutes to nine he had perceived, through the door of his office, volumes of flame issuing from a stand ; many other people made similar statements. At first the cause was supposed to be a short-circuit, but that was proved to be impossible. Only malicious intent could have started such an incredibly fierce fire in so short a time, even taking into consideration the slight and inflammable nature of the Exhibition buildings. It could hardly be believed. And yet nothing could have been easier than to carry out such a plan, for there had been constant complaints of the lax supervision of the exhibits and the number of thefts which had been committed.

Almost the whole of the Belgian section, the English section, and a large portion of the French, had fallen a prey to the flames. The German section had not even been touched. At nine o'clock, ten minutes after the first alarm, every member of the staff was at his post, ready to take action at the slightest sign of danger. The roof of the Kaiserhof was watered, and all the available firemen were mobilised.

Many people had suspicions. They were always in the same direction ; but no one ventured

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to speak out. To-day it is different. The suspicions have become accusations.

X.

THE same year, 1910, saw the first visit of the Queen to Parliament, and the beginning of her connection with the Socialist party. But her first introduction had been made before that, at the time of her wedding festivities.

The Belgian Socialists have often been turbulent and noisy, and King Leopold had no liking for them. The Royal marriage occasioned one of his rare sojourns in Brussels, and he was in a carriage, with Prince Albert beside him, when some journalists approached in order to address him. One of them, brandishing a red flag, began to shout : " Socialism for ever ! " King Leopold started and frowned at such audacity. At the same moment Elisabeth saw Prince Albert bend forward and salute the fanatic with his most gracious smile. The red flag disappeared as if by magic.

At her first visit to Parliament, Elisabeth herself took part in a similar episode. The

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King read his Speech from the Throne, and mingled with the applause which followed, there were Socialist cries of "Universal suffrage ! Dissolution !", while seditious leaflets were scattered about the hall. Little Prince Charles was much amused, and played with all the papers he could pick up. Prince Leopold, older and more thoughtful, asked: "What is the matter? Who is the gentleman who is talking all the time about Papa?"

"That is a very important person and a great speaker, my darling," said the Queen. "He is called Vandervelde."

After the sitting, apologies were made to the Queen, who, it was supposed, would be upset and annoyed ; but she replied simply:

"I am quite aware that there are Socialists in Belgium. If they want something, why should they not have the right to ask for it?"

XI.

CONSTANT changes of residence, state visits and perpetual receptions were very tiring for the Queen.

Her face was seen to lose something of its

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perfect oval and there were dark rings round her eyes. Still, knowing that her absence detracted from the brilliancy of a *fête*, she only smiled when she was entreated to rest. Royal personages were continually arriving in Brussels for the Exhibition—the King of Bulgaria, the Heir Apparent of Roumania and Princess Marie (now King and Queen), the sons of the German Emperor, Prince Hendrik of Holland, then Queen Wilhelmina, who was given a grand reception, Princes and Princesses of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (Queen Elisabeth's relations)—involving more fêtes and more fatigues.

On the 22nd November it was known that the Queen was suffering from acute bronchitis complicated by pleurisy. Her illness soon became extremely serious. For fear of alarming the patient, the King himself nursed her at first, with only the help of a maid who had been for fifteen years in Elisabeth's service. The King sat up for five nights and refused to rest until the worst of the danger was over. The bulletins, though as brief as possible, could not conceal the gravity of the illness. It was vexatious also that the Queen should have been taken ill at Laeken,

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which was not well provided for such a case, and was, besides, rather damp. The King's "Fête" was postponed, and for a whole month no one was admitted to the Queen's room. The Château was besieged by an anxious crowd, eager for news. If the affection of the people could have cured her, the Queen's illness would not have been long.

However, the danger was averted, and by the middle of January Elisabeth was sufficiently well to receive Prince and Princess Napoleon, who had then been married barely two months, and were paying their official visits to the European Courts. But after such a severe attack the Queen could not be allowed to spend the rest of the winter in Belgium. She still required great care, and stayed for some time at Rapallo, near Genoa, before setting out for Egypt, where it was hoped the warm climate would complete her cure. Though ill and suffering, the Queen was still the "Queen with the heart of gold," as her people loved to call her. It occurred to her that she was not the only one struck down during the winter, and she gave orders for seventy little girls to be sent to recover their health at

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La Hulpe, in the convalescent homes she had founded there.

When she entered the saloon carriage which was to convey her to Italy she found a magnificent basket of flowers sent by the Chamber of Deputies. She was the darling of Belgium, and the people would have done anything to please her. Flowers, even the most beautiful, seemed but a feeble expression of the loving veneration and fervent hopes of an entire nation.

It was the middle of February when she left Brussels. At Rapallo she was unable to go out for a month, but remained at the Imperial Hotel, while the King, who had accompanied her, made several excursions. About the beginning of March, however, she began to feel stronger. The King, who had returned to Brussels, came back to Rapallo to arrange for the voyage to Egypt. It would be interesting to count how often the King, divided between Belgium and Elisabeth, made the journey from Brussels to Possenhofen or Switzerland or Italy during the various summer visits of the Queen ; for even if she went away for a fortnight only, he always travelled with her,

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came again to spend a few days with her, and afterwards returned to take her home.

Together they took easy walks about Genoa and the neighbourhood while waiting for the *Canopic* which was to convey them to Alexandria. To avoid excitement and fatigue, they travelled *incognito* as Count and Countess Rethy. Their identity was, however, known to some of their faithful subjects, and when the gracious Countess set foot on the quay at Alexandria she was greeted by a small group from the Belgian Colony, who presented her with a sheaf of wonderful orchids. Orchids are rare in Egypt, but all that could be procured were readily offered to give a welcome to the Queen. Three motor cars had been provided, for the suite of the "Countess," though only a small one, comprised a lady-in-waiting, an orderly officer, a doctor, and two maids.

At Cairo, Elisabeth met her sister, Princess Marie Gabrielle, whose health already had caused uneasiness. The two sisters stayed there several months, while the King ascended the Nile as far as Luxor and Karnak and made interesting excursions into the surrounding country. The

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Queen regained strength day by day, and on the 11th April, as the King's absence could not be further prolonged, they embarked on the *Caledonian* and arrived in London on the 27th, in the strictest *incognito*, for the voyage had tired the Queen and she was obliged to keep her room for several days before continuing her journey. At last she arrived in Brussels, but none of the celebrations took place which had been planned for her return; for another month she was ill and confined to the Château of Laeken.

At the end of May, one fine sunny day, she took her first walk in the park, leaning on the King's arm. She walked slowly, but as though with fixed intention. As a matter of fact, she was on her way to see and admire the garden of her little boys, then in its full glory.

The little Princes, Leopold and Charles, are devoted to flowers, a taste they inherit from their mother. At Laeken they had a corner to themselves where they gardened with enthusiasm. Once, on his father's birthday, Prince Leopold, then seven or eight, appeared in the breakfast room carrying carefully something half concealed by his fair curls. He repeated his birthday

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greeting and offered his present. It was a flower pot containing a plant of lily of the valley, evidently the most precious thing he possessed.

XII.

FOR nearly a year Elisabeth's usually active life had been changed for that of a secluded invalid. Though she was unaware of it, this had also been a time of preparation. After her peaceful, studious childhood, after the hallowed joys of marriage and maternity, after the splendour and excitement of her first year as Queen, came the beginning of years of trial. Her heart was to pass through the furnace, to purge it of any alloy it might contain, and leave it nothing but pure gold. What had been begun by Karl Theodor and continued by Albert, was now to be completed by Elisabeth herself.

The year 1912 was for the Queen one of uninterrupted mourning. But her first great trial, the death of her father, had already befallen her at the end of 1909, and her husband's accession to the throne had obliged

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her to hide her sorrow with smiles, which only made it the more poignant.

The series of bereavements in 1912 began with the death of the Grand Duke of Luxembourg on the 28th February. He was uncle by marriage to the Queen, and the near neighbourhood of the two courts, added to family ties, had led to a close friendship.

On the 25th May, a telegram announced the death of Duchess Amélie of Urach, daughter of Duke Karl Theodor by his first wife. In spite of the great difference in age, the Queen loved her step-sister tenderly, and during her holidays never failed to visit her at her castle of Lichtenstein in Würtemberg.

In the following month, on the 28th June, the Royal house of Bavaria lost little Prince Rudolf, aged three, the third son of Rupprecht and Princess Marie Gabrielle. The poor mother, who was in delicate health, never recovered from the blow.

For a short time there was a respite, and it seemed as if Death had grown weary ; but soon other victims were claimed. Duke Franz Josef, the Queen's youngest brother, was cut off

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after a few days' illness, in the flower of his early manhood. This was a grievous loss to Elisabeth, whose family affection was exceedingly strong. Fears were again entertained for her health, but she bravely overcame her weakness. She attended the funeral and then returned to Brussels, accompanied by her sister, Countess Törring.

They endeavoured to console each other, recalling memories of their childhood and of the dear ones who had been taken from them. They were together one autumn evening, perhaps contrasting their own evergreen forests with the changing colours of our northern woods, when the King came into the room. He was overcome with emotion and almost unable to speak. At last he told them of the sudden death, at Sorrento, of Princess Marie Gabrielle, without any warning that the end was so near. The two sisters fell weeping into each other's arms.

The King went alone to Munich, for he would not allow the Queen's health to be injured by any painful agitation which it was possible to avoid.

But the cup of sorrow was not yet full. The following month the Countess of Flanders gave

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up her pure soul to God. She died on the 26th November in the arms of her son. In the death of this admirable woman the Queen lost a second mother who had always been to her a loving friend and a wise counsellor. The Countess of Flanders, who, in a secondary position, had succeeded in maintaining her dignity without provoking hurtful jealousies, had been the best of all guides for Princess Albert. And when Elisabeth was unable to take her children with her on her journeys, she confided them to her mother-in-law, knowing that in her keeping they would be as safe as in her own.

The grief of the King was intense, and at the funeral he was unable to control his emotion. The fact that he was habitually calm and imperturbable made this display of feeling all the more touching, and it was, moreover, an eloquent tribute to the lamented Princess. Among the hundreds of wreaths there was one composed of masses of orchids, from Albert and Elisabeth, "to our beloved mother."

The health of the King as well as that of the Queen, was affected by this great sorrow. For several months he was said to be unwell, to be

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suffering from sciatica, to be obliged to keep in his room—a thing which had never happened before.

Towards the end of this ill-fated year the grand figure of the Regent of Bavaria, the venerable Prince Luitpold, also disappeared. He was 91 and his death was expected, but he was deeply mourned none the less. His son Ludwig had not inherited his great popularity. The Bavarian people had often expressed the wish that Luitpold would allow himself to be crowned King, but he preferred to keep the title of *Reichsverweser*. His son, hoping to make himself popular, deposed Otto, the brother of Ludwig II., who had been nominal King for many years, and assumed the crown as Ludwig III. of Bavaria. Rupprecht, the eldest son of Ludwig and brother-in-law of Queen Elisabeth, thus became heir to the throne.

For a long time the Queen's life was a nightmare. What would she hear next? What new misfortune threatened her? If the King complained of indisposition, if one of the children had a slight cough, her heart stopped beating, and closing her eyes in her anguish, she seemed to see the skeleton form of Death pointing his bony finger at one or other of her darlings.

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But Time moves on, drawing us along also, and things that have happened drift into the domain of memory. And let us be grateful to Providence that bygone sorrows so often lose the sharpness of their sting while past happiness grows still brighter as we look back upon it.

XIII.

ONCE more Court mourning was exchanged for festive garments, though loving hearts were mourning still. Life was gay and brilliant in Brussels during the years which preceded the war. Industry and commerce had made great strides, and wealth flowed into the country. Society life was full of gaiety and movement. Following the example of the King and Queen, the leading Belgian families of Croy, Chimay, Lignes, Grünne, d'Oultremont, and many others, entertained largely, thus making Brussels a delightful capital and spreading prosperity among the working classes.

The year 1913 was a tranquil one for Queen Elisabeth, a period of rest before the great struggle.

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The absence of pomp in the Royal Family is well known, so much so that before the war the honest Belgian folk would perhaps have liked a little more pride and display ; but simplicity of taste in a sovereign is an indication of goodness of heart. To Albert and Elisabeth no worldly splendour could equal the homely charm of evenings spent in their own family circle.

The Queen watched carefully over the training of her children.

“Never forget this,” she would say. “The world judges princes by their deeds and not by their words.”

Yet we must not give a wrong impression of her. She is no ascetic. Like her aunt, the Empress Elisabeth, and indeed like almost all the Wittelsbachs, she is an accomplished horse-woman. She is passionately fond of flowers and always has them about her. In the *Rue de la Science* as well as in the Royal Palace, she always superintended the table decorations for her dinner parties. Flowers seem the necessary complement of her delicate beauty. Every winter there were balls at the Palace of Prince and Princess Albert. In January 1909 there were three which were

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specially brilliant. For the first the Princess chose pink carnations, for the second anemones, and for the third white roses, of which she seems to be particularly fond. The staircases and ballrooms were entirely decorated with these flowers. Then—and this is another instance of her constant desire to give pleasure—at the conclusion of the ball she and the Prince themselves distributed the flowers to their guests, for whom they became, by a kind of Saint Elisabeth miracle, forget-me-nots.

As a Queen she remained faithful to her love for flowers.

XIV.

THE Queen is devoted to music. It is not merely a pastime with her, but an art which she never ceased to cultivate. Knowing that without practice proficiency cannot be maintained, she continued to study under the direction of Edouard Duru, afterwards appointed violinist to the King and Queen. Duru is himself a pupil of Isaye, the greatest violinist of the day, of whom Belgium is justly proud.

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The Queen loves the music of the past, the old songs of Weckerlin. Before the war she caused the little Court theatre at Laeken to be renovated and modernised for the performance of the classics.

She is charming to composers. When Saint-Saëns visited Brussels for the first performance of *Déjanire*, the whole of the Opera Company was invited to the Royal Palace. The gentlemen received from the King and Queen gold cigarette cases, each lady a pendant, and the master a portrait of his Royal hosts.

She often visited exhibitions, and, not content with this manner of doing honour to the artists, she adorned her residences with the works of Bénard, Clémence Lacroix, Georgette Meunier, Artot, Verhaeren, and the landscape painter Courtens, whom she allowed to use a room in the Château of Laeken as a studio when he was painting in the park.

She surrounded herself also with the works of the engravers Montenez, Senain and many others. The sculptor, Victor Rousseau, was commissioned to make the first busts of the King and Queen,

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and afterwards one of Princess Marie José. Khnopff executed one of the Duke of Brabant, Wollis painted the portrait of the little Princess, and Richir one of the Queen. She visited the artist Laermans who was threatened with blindness, and gave him encouragement and hope.

XV.

THIS last instance brings us back to what has always been the Queen's absorbing interest —philanthropy. But it is noteworthy that of all the benevolent institutions which continually claimed her assistance, she inclined especially to those which concerned childhood, as though she always had in mind the words of Him who said : "Suffer the little children to come unto Me."

She gave twenty thousand francs in aid of "Infant Welfare" when she became Queen. She established at the seaside, at La Hulpe and at Wendruyne, little colonies of cottages where children recovering from illness could complete their cure ; she founded the Queen Elisabeth Schools and the Karl Theodor Schools. The *Fondation Reine Elisabeth*, one of the most

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important institutions of the kind, is like a little University of Childhood, and contains crèches, maternity outfits, rooms for gratis consultations for young mothers, and a model dairy. Prizes are awarded to the mothers whose children are best cared for, according to the hygienic precepts of the doctors and lady patronesses appointed by the Queen.

The people of Brussels so thoroughly understood Elisabeth's predilection that whenever it was a question of some festivity in her honour, children were always present. When she returned from Egypt after her long illness, the Municipal Council of Laeken, wishing to give her some special gratification, could think of nothing so pleasing to her as a gathering of fifteen thousand school children in the park and gardens of the Château.

Now, beneath this love of hers for children lies a deeper purpose. She delights in little rosy-cheeked babies, but the basis of her interest in them is sociological; for she realises that it is on children that the future of a nation depends.

And there is nothing narrow about her. I do not suppose that she makes her own gowns;

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I do not think she is a professional typist ; I am not sure that she has any talent for cookery. At any rate, the King has never boasted that she cooks him appetising little dinners. And, frankly, I cannot imagine the Queen in a white apron giving orders in the kitchen department of the Royal Palace. Nor has she spent long winter evenings knitting woollen garments to clothe the poor in the following spring. Her good deeds are on a noble scale, as befits a Queen.

And let us consider also from this standpoint, what is her attitude with regard to the position of woman, one of the most important questions of to-day, and one which may be very much more so to-morrow. A single instance will suffice to show the firm, practical, and at the same time sympathetic manner in which the Queen attacks such problems.

Seeing with regret that the hand-made lace industry was almost disappearing she founded a society called *La Dentellière Belge*, thinking rightly that there are many women in the world who would rather possess a little real lace than

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yards and yards of bad imitation. The aim of this society was to collect the most skilful workers in Belgium, to provide them with the necessary materials, and to find an outlet for their work. Thanks to the energy of the Queen and to her talent for organising, the necessary funds were soon forthcoming, and from the beginning it was evident that this useful and patriotic scheme would lead to great developments.

A Lace Exhibition was organised by the *Société de le Grande Harmonie*. The Brussels people must still remember the beauty of it. In rooms decorated with wistaria (one of the Queen's favourite flowers) there were groups illustrating the history of lace through the centuries. The costumes were marvels of accuracy, all copied from museums and other collections. The King and Queen and the rest of the Royal Family honoured the Exhibition with their presence. The Queen had never appeared more ideally lovely. She wore a dress of lace, embroidered with gold and pearls ; from her shoulders hung a mantle of lace showing the arms of the Nine Towns, her wedding gift from the ladies of Brussels. Her coronet of large turquoises and

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diamonds suited her fair beauty to perfection. She was a vision recalling the Queens of the famous Courts of Love, or the white-robed saints in an old missal, and a whisper went round : "She is an Angel !"



EPILOGUE.

EPILOGUE.

I.

HE spring of 1914 found the King and Queen in Switzerland. Elisabeth had spent some time at a villa near Lausanne ; when the King joined her they paid an official visit to Berne and then returned to Brussels. All was quiet and peaceful. A vast project to make Brussels a seaport occupied public attention. The work of the ship canal was nearly finished, and it was to be inaugurated in the month of September. Grand festivities were contemplated, and it was expected that the training ship, *L'Avenir* (The Future), would return from her voyage round the world in time for the great occasion. *L'Avenir* loomed large in the minds of the people, for in truth it was on this school for sailors that the future of young Belgium and her Colonies depended.

On the 30th June the news rang through Europe that Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the Princess of Hohenberg had been assassinated at Serajevo. The world was horror-struck, but very few people saw in this catastrophe any pretext

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for a world war. There were some, however, and they were laughed at as Cassandra's.

In less than a month, the spark so assiduously fanned by the powerful breath of ambition, hate and discord, had set all Europe aflame.

On the 1st August the people of Brussels saw, with uneasy curiosity, processions of future soldiers passing through their streets—Frenchmen returning from Germany to France, Germans coming back from France or from England. They watched them depart, commiserating them without any foreboding of the fate that awaited themselves.

Then, like a thunderbolt, came the amazing ultimatum of Germany to Belgium. Taken absolutely by surprise, the brave little nation never hesitated for a moment. She rose, to a man, to rush upon the cowardly invader, and like David before Goliath, slung at the Teuton Colossus the stone which was to kill him.

The King in his Palace cried:

“No thoroughfare!”

The peasant in his cottage cried:

“No thoroughfare!”

Women and children cried:

“No thoroughfare!”

EPILOGUE.

Anyone who passed through Belgium before the war will remember the women stationed at the Custom houses. It was their duty, among other things, to examine the luggage of travellers and this they did thoroughly.

When the first Uhlans arrived at the frontier, one of these women was at her post. She was a little old woman, wrinkled and sallow, wearing a cap on her white hair and wrapped in a loosely knitted black shawl which almost touched the ground. When she saw them coming she advanced to meet them until they were within earshot. Then she stopped, maybe breathing her last prayer, and with folded arms cried hoarsely :

“No thoroughfare!”

She was answered by shouts of brutal laughter, and a well-aimed shot poured on the soil of Belgium the blood of her first martyr.

What the soul of Belgium passed through then has been told a hundred times. It is already history. Yet we do not weary of either telling or hearing it. And we must never weary.

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II.

THE education of Elisabeth was complete. Begun by Duke Karl Theodor, continued by Prince Albert, she finished it for herself in bitter trials and anxiety.

And the hour for which this rare spirit had been prepared by the exceptional development of her moral and intellectual faculties, had now struck.

Albert as a King, and still more as a man, was placed between two alternatives. He had to choose between inaction (cowardly, perhaps, but surely excusable) and a course of absolute foolhardiness, though it was honourable, intrepid, heroic—a dilemma unique in history.

Unique? No. The Queen's position was equally difficult whichever way she decided. Nothing is harder for a human being than to have to make such a decision. For Elisabeth it meant that she must tear from her heart all that was not Belgian. She must, like a nun who dedicates herself to God, banish from her mind everything but her duty.

For one moment, may be, she may have given way to a feeling of weakness. She knew

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well what would happen if resistance were offered to the fiendish monster of Berlin. What if she averted all this suffering from the people? She might possibly win approval from some ; from some she might win blessings. One word from her, and Albert, ordinarily so firm, would yield to her prayer ; such is the power of women !

Has not another Queen, the Queen of a kingdom which owes its freedom to the Allied nations, since then abused her power in a disastrous way ? It was a terrible temptation—how great, perhaps she never realised. But she did not hesitate ; that was impossible to her upright soul.

Ah, Elisabeth ! May we not envy the courage which enabled you, though your heart was pierced with anguish, to break with your Bavarian kindred ? Who would not bow down humbly before your heroism, physical as well as moral, before your noble strength of mind ?

And who would not weep with you tears of gratitude to God for taking to Himself your beloved father, before this terrible catastrophe, and so saving you from a rupture with the being

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you loved best in the world until you knew Albert?

III.

THE King, having spent the night in consultation with his Ministers, to whom during the day he had added Paul Hymans and Baron Goblet d'Aviella, decided on resistance. Rather death than dishonour !

The next day there was a solemn sitting of Parliament. At ten o'clock the great gates of the Palace swung open, and the Queen's carriage came out first. Elisabeth was with her children, Princes Leopold and Charles and Princess Marie José. (Poor little Princess ! Probably on this 4th August, her birthday, the usual beautiful presents had been forgotten.) The King came out next, surrounded by the famous Marie Henriette squadron.

All Brussels watched the passing of the Royal *cortège*, and cheers such as those which greeted the Queen had never been heard before. They were not shouts of joy, but cries from heroic hearts, overflowing with righteous indignation, and prepared to meet the horrors of war, cries of love

EPILOGUE.

and gratitude, as though they would say : “ You are with us, we are with you, until death ! ” The Civic Guard raised their caps on their bayonet points ; flags and handkerchiefs fluttered in the wind. It was an unforgettable scene, this crowd entirely carried away by an immense wave of heroism.

The sitting of Parliament was not a long one. The necessary explanations were given to the representatives of the people, and the King impetuously mounted the tribune.

“ Swear,” he cried, “ to maintain intact what we have inherited from our ancestors ! ”

And the answer rang out like a single voice : “ We swear ! ”

The meeting broke up amid shouts of : “ *Vive le Belgique indépendante !* ”

IV.

THE return of the King and Queen to the Palace was accompanied by the same exclamations. The populace seemed intoxicated with enthusiasm. It was a triumphal progress such as the Queen had never seen before,

OUR LADY OF BELGIUM.

not even at her first entrance into Brussels. Elisabeth, holding herself erect, her face as white as her gown, her glance fixed on the unknown future whose horrors she foresaw, her heart uplifted and on her lips a courageous smile, had already set foot on the first steps of her Calvary.

Since that historic day the eyes of the world have been on Elisabeth and her deeds are known to all. In every land and in every tongue it has been told how with lightning rapidity she transformed, first the Palace at Brussels, then her Antwerp residence, into a hospital; how she accompanied the King and the Army in the retreat; how she repudiated all her rights in Bavaria and proclaimed herself Belgian before all else, and Belgian only; how with her own dexterous hands she tended the wounded whom the King himself brought in from the battlefield; how she gained the title of Guardian Angel of the Belgian Army.

EPILOGUE.

V.

MY task is ended. I have tried to trace the growth of a noble, strong and steadfast character, a character which is unique. It has been impossible to avoid panegyrics, seeing that this character is a compound of every good quality. But one question suggests itself—Are these good qualities Teutonic or Latin? The answer is an answer to all the questions which are raised by the war.

These qualities are neither French nor German ; they are human. Goodness is progress, is civilisation. For that we are fighting. Brute force cannot be progress and this war has proved it. This is why a weak little country like Belgium has been permitted to vanquish mighty Germany.

For the victory belongs to Belgium. Splendid as France has shown herself to be, wonderful as are the efforts of England, great as are the merits of our other Allies, the victory belongs to Belgium. It was decided in the first few days by the heroic resistance of Liège. Without that could the French Army have organised the battle of the Marne, or the English Army have come to

OUR LADY OF BELGIUM.

their aid ? And all that has followed, even the sublime defence of Verdun, has it not been, taking it all together, the result of that first week at Liège?

It is said of the Germans that they have the Government they deserve ; and that this horde of savages, knowing neither faith nor righteousness, and having seized the advantages of modern science only to turn them to infamous use, of their own free will placed at their head brigands such as Frederick the Great and William II. The accusation is true. But it is just as true also that the people of Belgium deserve credit for being governed by an Albert and an Elisabeth. Both nations have acted according to their desires. By her own free will Germany has covered herself with disgrace. Belgium was neutral, was sacred, and the killing of the first Belgian soldier was not only in itself a crime—one among a hundred others—but the chief and the greatest, enough to pillory a whole nation in the sight of the human race. And it is by *her* free will, though with the simplicity which always distinguishes the brave, that Belgium has so bravely done her duty and defended what she holds most sacred—her honour and her liberty.

EPILOGUE.

This is why the cause of Belgium is not merely that of a small nation against a great one, but it is the cause of all humanity against the powers of evil. She fights for the world at large.

And may we not see the finger of God in the fact that in this war the figure which shines out with the brightest lustre, has come to us from the enemy's camp ? Does not this prove that it is not a question of the conquest of territory, but of the triumph of good over evil ? Elisabeth does not only represent the soul of Belgium ; she represents all that is best and noblest in the heart. In very truth, she is more than Our Lady of Belgium. She is Our Lady of Humanity.



*Begun on the birthday of King
Albert in 1916, and finished the
same year on the birthday of
Queen Elisabeth.*

L.L.

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